THE TIE THAT BINDS

BY

ELEANOR H. PORTER

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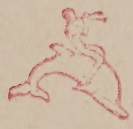
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JUST DAVID. Illustrated.

The Tie that Binds

"SHALL I CHANGE IT TO—ER—WHITE?" (*page 23*)

THE TIE THAT BINDS

BY

ELEANOR H. PORTER

With Drawings By
Helen Mason Grose

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TO MY FRIEND

SARAH F. DEARBORN

Contents

THE CAT AND THE PAINTER 1
THE HEART OF A HUNCHBACK 24
POLLY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE 42
NUTS TO CRACK AND MARY ELLEN 61
TO LET — AN APARTMENT 88
HER WEDDING JOURNEY 113
THE SUBJUGATION OF JOAN 122
A MATTER OF LOYALTY 137
JACK 153
A WOMAN YOU KNOW 182
ESCORTING HARRIET 205
A CASE OF THE INEVITABLE 234
THE ANGEL OF PEACE AND BILLY 255
THE SECOND FIDDLE 270
A QUARANTINED QUARREL 293
A WHITE ROSE 311
THE SQUARING OF MR. JACK 329
LOOSED 351

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Illustrations

"Shall I change it to — er — white?" (*Page* 22) *Frontispiece*

"Did you find the — ball?" 76

"We can't take any at all, Miss Matilda" . 118

"Why, he caught it!" 166

"Why, Edward!" 250

It was Edith who went with him to the door . 276

"For God's sake — don't give me away!" . 330

Drawn by Helen Mason Grose

The Tie that Binds

The Cat and the Painter

ME–OW–W! It was a plaintive wail that came from behind the ash barrel in the alley-way.

A small boy across the street turned his head and looked over inquiringly. The forlorn little furry heap by the ash barrel crouched lower and slunk back into the shadows. The kitten's knowledge of small boys was just two hours old — but it was sufficient.

A chill wind whistled around the corner, and she tucked her tiny paws beneath her — a little shivering bunch of misery out in the fast-gathering twilight.

It had been so delightful to scurry out the hall door when Miss Dorothy was not looking — out into the bright sunshine, where the red and yellow leaves were chasing each other down the smooth walk in front of the house. She had rolled and tumbled among those leaves in a delirious whirl of freedom, and had given

frantic chase to one particularly tantalizing bit of scarlet that had sailed along just ahead of her nose.

Then there came a time when the sunshine fled and the leaves lay quiet, refusing to play, even when she poked them with her little insistent paw. She had run far down the street, and everything was new and strange to her. A big dog bounced around the corner, and she was obliged to scramble up a tree to escape his horrid, gaping jaws.

She had accomplished her fearsome descent from this disquieting elevation when a group of small boys hailed her appearance with yells of delight. Then to her tail—her beautiful fluffy tail, of which Miss Dorothy was so plainly proud—they had tied a cruel cord with a jangling tin can at the end. Down the street she had wildly fled, around corners, through back alleys, followed always by that deafening rattle dangling at the tip of her tail.

The shouts of the boys grew fainter and fainter, and finally ceased altogether. It was then that she had stopped, and tugged and bit at the knotted cord until at last she could

switch her tail from side to side — free from its hated burden.

She had been trembling and shivering in that alley-way now for many a long minute. There was no soft basket-bed, no warm milk, no Miss Dorothy's white hand to pat and stroke her fur. The small boy across the street stayed quietly listening for a time, then he turned and walked off, whistling. A minute later the kitten rose to her feet and stealthily slipped out into the open.

"Me-ow-w!"

"Whew! little cat, is it so bad as all that?"

He was tall, wore a soft black hat, and carried a cane, which he playfully twirled over the kitten's head as he spoke. A moment more and he had passed along.

The kitten's tail came upright instantly, waving an appreciative welcome to the kindly tones. She looked wistfully after the retreating figure, hesitated, then fell into a brisk trot, her softly cushioned feet giving no sign of her presence even when close at his heels.

Two blocks down the street, the man turned the corner and ran up the steps of a substan-

tial-looking house bearing the unmistakable hall-mark of old-time gentility. His latch-key was in his hand before he spied the kitten. She had sprung lightly to the topmost step, and was now facing him, her agitated little body and upraised tail plainly expressing her assurance of a welcome.

"Why — pussy!"

"Meow!"

The plaintiveness was gone; the cry told only her eagerness to enter the house.

Mechanically the man obeyed the obvious command, unlocked the door and pushed it open. The kitten was inside the hall with a bound, beginning at once, after the fashion of her kind, a tour of inspection. The man was gazing helplessly at the restless little creature when his landlady came out of the parlor.

"Oh, what a beauty, Mr. Heywood! Where did you get it?"

"That's just the trouble, Mrs. Merriam; I didn't get it at all — it came!" Heywood's forehead was crossed with perplexed lines, and he followed the cat's motions with dubious eyes.

"Came to you? How perfectly lovely! The very best sign of good luck that you could possibly have!" And Mrs. Merriam clapped her plump hands together softly. "There's not a bit of doubt now, Mr. Heywood, — your picture will be a certain success. It's almost an Angora, too, — just look at that tail!" she continued ecstatically, mixing pictures and cats with serene indiscrimination. "Here, pussy, pretty pussy, — come here!"

The kitten stopped and eyed the coaxing hand with a calmly critical gaze. She was warm — she was comfortable — the outstretched hand contained no tempting dainty — she could see no reason for immediate capitulation. Very slowly she settled back on her tiny haunches, winking and blinking solemnly.

"Provoking things — cats are so independent!" murmured Mrs. Merriam, drawing back her hand.

"But what am I to do with it?" asked Heywood.

"Do with it? Why, you're going to keep it, of course, — if you can," she added, after

a pause. "You probably won't have any such luck, though, — some one will claim it."

"Well, if it was a dog, now; but a cat — !" He dropped into the chair behind him, and meditatively stroked his chin.

At his sudden move, the kitten turned. With a run and a spring she was in his lap, purring and rubbing against his hands and coat; in another moment she was on his shoulders, curled around his neck like a boa — a position Miss Dorothy had taught her with much labor and pains.

"Wonderful! Just see how she takes to you!" exclaimed Mrs. Merriam, a shade of envy in her voice. "If signs count for anything, Mr. Heywood, you're a lucky man."

"Yes, I suppose so," he acquiesced with a short laugh, playfully tweaking a silky ear that brushed against his cheek. And the kitten purred content.

In two days' time a yellow ball of fur, set with two beadlike eyes of turquoise blue, frisked and frolicked from cellar to garret of number thirty-four Union Avenue. But although the entire house was hers for the ask-

ing, the one spot most dear to her heart was the studio up one flight. Here her capers were the merriest, her songs the loudest, her slumbers the soundest.

On that first morning after her arrival, she had settled herself in the artist's favorite seat, and at his gentle poke of mild protest, she had but opened a sleepy eye, stretched with a sigh of content, and sung the louder.

"Well, by Jove!" murmured the man, the old helplessness coming into his face. Then he sheepishly crossed the room and took another chair — a proceeding that was repeated for exactly three mornings. After that, the small tyrant was left in possession of the coveted seat without so much as an instant's protest.

The kitten had arrived with a bedraggled ribbon of what had once been lustrous white satin around her neck. This forlorn bit of finery Heywood at once consigned to the waste-basket, substituting a band of blue cut from a roll of ribbon which he had promptly bought, after a careful scrutiny of his guest's eyes to obtain just the proper shade.

He surveyed with much satisfaction the result of his artistic combination of colors; but the roll of ribbon soon began to show signs of a rapid disappearance, so frequently was the necklet renewed. This was owing to the fact that the kitten's usual companions, during her waking hours, were Heywood's tubes of paint.

The first time she had jumped upon his low stand and poked her inquisitive nose into his paint-box, he had looked on in dumb dismay. A skirmish, a sweep of a yellow paw — and a tube of Rose Madder leaped from the box and scurried across the floor with the kitten in full pursuit.

It was then that Heywood had caught up his crayon and drawn hurried lines on the canvas before him; and it was that rough sketch that became the first study for his famous picture, "The Kittens' Playground."

After that he used every device in his power to interest the kitten in that paint-box — and successfully, too, for she never rested until she had emptied the box and batted and rolled the last tube to some obscure corner under

table or chair. Then, while his model slept, the artist gathered the spoils and patiently worked at his easel, so that in time his walls were hung with yellow kittens portrayed in every conceivable position.

From the very first the little stranger had not lacked for a name. She was always referred to as "Her Majesty," and right royally she ruled the household. Once only did her independent willfulness receive a check. It was when, from her position on Heywood's shoulder, she had struck with her far-reaching paw the end of Heywood's brush as he painted.

There was an ominous silence while the artist's eyes were fixed on the splash of emerald green straight in the middle of his carefully blended sunset sky. Very quietly he laid down his palette and brush, and with determined hands reached for the cat on his shoulder. Without a word he crossed the room with the culprit, dropped her on the hall floor outside, and shut the door hard — that door which never before was closed to Her Majesty.

An hour later, in passing through the hall,

Heywood came upon a disconsolate ball of yellow fur crouching in the farthermost corner.

"Well, madam!"

There was a rush of cushioned feet, a frantic waving of a yellow tail, and the kitten was rubbing in abject adoration against his trousers.

The corners of his mouth twitched, then he laughed outright.

"I'll accept your apology," he said, as he stooped to bestow forgiveness; "but I'll see that you don't have a chance to offer me another one, young lady," he added grimly.

It was two weeks before Her Majesty's new surroundings palled upon her and she longed for other worlds to conquer. Coincident with this longing came the open back-yard gate. A wild scamper, and she was free—out in the wide, wide world!

Through the alley and across the lot another open gate tempted her. A strangely familiar something came to her nostrils, a half-forgotten sound to her ears. Two maids were in the yard, their backs turned toward her.

Up the steps, through the kitchen door, and on into the dining-room pattered the little yellow feet.

"Why, Queenie!—you darling!" And she was in Miss Dorothy's arms.

"Where have you been?" the girl demanded, after the first ecstasy of welcome was over. "You little dear—you're as plump as a partridge, anyway! Some one has appreciated you," she added, with another hug. "But they've taken off your pretty white ribbon and put on a horrid blue one. We'll go and change it right away, sweetheart. I never did like blue!" And Miss Dorothy, with her restored treasure in her arms, went upstairs to the living-room.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the square at thirty-four Union Avenue something very like consternation reigned.

"Where's Her Majesty?"—Heywood was the most patient of men save only where his art was concerned. Just now the curve of an ear, or the shade of a bit of fur, was baffling him. He wanted his model, and his voice was sharp with command.

"I don't know, but I'll hunt her up," responded Mrs. Merriam with the alacrity she always showed when Heywood spoke that way.

Five minutes later she came back with a troubled face.

"She's gone, Mr. Heywood. Bridget says she saw her run out the back-yard gate."

"*Saw* her run?—Why in the dickens didn't she stop her, then? My picture isn't half done—I tell you I must have that cat!"

"Well, I'll look again," murmured Mrs. Merriam hurriedly—she had never seen Mr. Heywood quite like this before. "Maybe the little thing's in the lot—I'll see," And the woman backed toward the door.

Heywood climbed the stairs with a wrathful emphasis on each step. In his studio his face brightened, and he looked around eagerly—perhaps she was there asleep. How quiet everything was! Even the clock had ceased to tick; he had forgotten to wind it the night before. The tubes of paint in his box were pathetic in their quiet order. He poked them gently with his finger, then shook himself with

a frown. His favorite chair was conveniently empty now, but he walked all around the room before he finally marched up to it with resolute step and sat down determinedly.

"Such a fool — and over a cat, too!" he muttered between his teeth.

Perhaps the kitten missed her box of pigment playthings, or perhaps she longed for the masculine homage she did not find at home; at any rate, three days later, when she heard a familiar call from across the open lot, she slipped through the back-yard gate and hurried in the direction of Mrs. Merriam's voice.

It had been one of Mrs. Merriam's self-imposed duties during all those days to stand often at her gate and call for the lost kitten; and it was with a heart swelling with triumphant pleasure that she carried the visible reward of her faithful search up to Heywood's studio.

"I 've got her," she announced breathlessly; "but I guess she 's found her home, Mr. Heywood. I don't know 's we ought to keep her — you see her ribbon 's changed.

"Yes, I see it is," the man acknowledged with a grim smile. "But that's easily remedied. I shan't paint her in a white one," he concluded, fumbling with the knot.

"But — shall we keep her?" asked Mrs. Merriam timidly.

Heywood pulled at the ribbon impatiently.

"We'll try to — until the picture is done, anyway," he said with decision, reaching for the roll of blue ribbon.

Mrs. Merriam noticed that he wrote something on a scrape of paper, and tied it in with the knot as he fastened the ribbon about the yellow throat.

"Whatever in the world are you doing?" she demanded, with the freedom of a privileged character.

"Merely giving a bit of advice over against the time it may be needed," retorted Heywood with a short laugh, going back to his easel.

Answered, but not enlightened, Mrs. Merriam left him to his work.

When the kitten had first come to the house, Heywood had been engaged upon an elaborate landscape, which he had intended to finish and

present to the judges of a forthcoming Art Exhibition wherein he hoped to win honor and fame. But since the first study of Her Majesty his interest in the landscape had waned. Abandoning his original plan, he was now hard at work on "The Kittens' Playground," determined to exhibit that or nothing.

The Art Exhibition was now but a month distant, and the frequent presence of Her Majesty in the artist's studio was most necessary. For a week she was closely guarded and the picture grew apace; then one day she disappeared.

High and low they searched, but all in vain. Her Majesty was gone.

Across the square Miss Dorothy was tenderly caressing an animated ball of yellow fur.

"Queenie, Queenie, what does this mean? What am I to think when you run away from me so? Who are your new friends who insist on tying those odious blue ribbons around your neck?"

The kitten rolled over on her back and winked her blue eyes wickedly.

"Here, just let me take off the horrid thing and — why, what is this!" she exclaimed, interrupting herself in amazement as a tiny crumpled paper dropped into her hand.

"Kindly leave the blue ribbon on. I like it better — it's more artistic," she read.

"Well, really — impertinent creature!" she commented aloud, with reddening cheeks and an ominous flash in her eyes. Then she laughed, caught up a pencil, and wrote on the back of the paper:

"So sorry — but I prefer white!"

This she deftly tied in with the big white bow at the top, and let the kitten go. Strange to say, she did not guard the gates and doors so closely now, nor did she seem disturbed when, before the day was gone, Queenie was not to be found.

When the small yellow cat and the big white bow appeared before Heywood that night, he laughed outright at the aggressiveness expressed in each loop and end of that bow. With careful fingers he undid the knot, and then he laughed again.

"As I expected," he murmured, critically

examining the writing — graceful, in spite of disadvantages.

When the blue again adorned the kitten's neck, it bore with it this message:

"I regret to be obliged a second time to call your attention to the fact that blue is the only possible ribbon for this cat. Look at her eyes!"

The picture was nearly done now. Her Majesty came and went much at her own sweet will, and it was not two days before another huge white bow appeared on her neck to mock Heywood's gaze. His fingers shook a little as he untied the knot and freed the tiny crumpled paper.

"I regret to be obliged a second time to call your attention to the fact that I prefer white. Look at her — whiskers!" he read.

Heywood chuckled. For an irresolute moment he drew the bit of white satin meditatively through his fingers, his longing eyes fixed on the roll of blue across the room; then a shamefaced smile curved his lips and a faint red showed on his forehead.

Very slowly he tied the white ribbon again

about the kitten's neck, and stuffed the tiny note into his pocket.

Her Majesty did not leave the house that night, nor the next day, nor yet the next. She stayed on and on, with every indication of making that her permanent abiding-place.

The time of the Exhibition arrived and Heywood had thoughts but for one thing. At last his picture was hung, and so attractive did it prove to be that it bade fair to realize his dearest hopes.

It represented the interior of an artist's studio, and the rich hangings, statuary, and old armor had given Heywood an opportunity for a particularly fine bit of work. The whole was but the setting for four yellow kittens — the cleverest, most fascinating yellow kittens in the world, peeping from behind curtains, tumbling among the rugs, rolling over tubes of paint — lifelike, bewitching, and altogether perfection.

It was on the third day of the Exhibition that a tall girl in drooping feathers and rich furs stopped before the picture with an exclamation of delight.

"It's Queenie!—why, it's Queenie to the very life!—'C. R. Heywood. Not for sale,'" she read disappointedly from her catalogue.

Then she sought the manager at his desk.

"This 'Kittens' Playground'—it is not for sale?" she asked.

"No, madam."

"But the artist, Heywood,—does he live in the city? Can you give me his address?"

"Thirty-four Union Avenue, madam," replied the man, consulting the book on his desk.

"Thank you. The very next street below us!" she added under her breath, as she turned away.

Dorothy Marsh was not a young woman who dallied. Once determined on a course, action quickly followed. Her mother, always gentle and pleasantly acquiescent, was hurried into the carriage and the order, "Thirty-four Union Avenue," given to the coachman.

Upon their arrival at the house, the two ladies were shown into the studio, and in a moment Heywood appeared.

The girl was in the middle of the floor, turning round and round in amazement.

"Why, they're all Queenie — every last one of them!" she exclaimed.

The man bowed, and a peculiar smile flickered across his face.

"They are, indeed, all — 'Her Majesty.'"

He had not time to say more, for at the first tones of the girl's voice there was the crash of a falling vase and the scampering of little feet from an inner room. Then with a spring and a bound a small yellow kitten landed in Miss Dorothy's outstretched arms.

There was a moment's awkward silence. Mrs. Marsh unconsciously came to the rescue.

"Why, it is our kitten, is n't it? This must be where she goes so often, daughter."

The color deepened in the girl's cheeks and she threw a quick glance at Heywood.

"It evidently is, mother," she laughed, her fingers nervously toying with the white ribbon about the kitten's neck.

Heywood's approving eyes dropped from the girl's face to the kitten, and even the hated white ribbon appeared lovely to him, so glori-

fied was it by the slim, gray-gloved fingers slipping in and out of the loops.

Mrs. Marsh turned to the artist.

"My daughter has taken a great fancy to your kitten picture at the Exhibition, Mr. Heywood. We—er—I see that the catalogue states that it is not for sale, but my daughter would not be satisfied until we learned from you that such was really the case and that you could not be induced to part with it."

Not part with it?— To Heywood it suddenly seemed that there was nothing he would not part with if the slender young woman in the big picture-hat but so much as turned a longing eye upon it; and then there was the kitten—her kitten.

"Indeed, madam, it *was* my intention to keep the picture," he began, speaking to the mother, though looking at the daughter, "but"—the kitten jumped from the girl's arms to the floor and began playing with a tube of paint—"well, there are circumstances—" he continued; then he paused again.

"Yes, there are circumstances," repeated the girl softly, her eyes on the kitten.

"Yes, circumstances which — which alter determinations," he suddenly concluded, following her gaze with his eyes.

Dorothy was strangely silent through the rest of the interview, leaving to her mother and Heywood the task of making all necessary arrangements for the purchase of the picture when the Exhibition should be concluded.

Perhaps she was seized with a sudden distrust of her own powers of persuasion; or perhaps the fact that the kitten had abandoned her plaything and had ensconced her fickle self on Heywood's shoulder, there to wink and blink her turquoise eyes just beneath Heywood's ear, had something to do with it.

It was when the ladies were leaving that the artist lifted Her Majesty from his shoulder and placed her in Dorothy's arms. His hand rested in a momentary caress on the round yellow head, then his fingers just touched the white bow at the neck.

"The ribbon in the picture, Miss Marsh,"

he began, closely studying the girl's face, "shall I change it to — er — white?"

"Thank you, no. I — I prefer the blue," she answered, with a sudden flash from her eyes and a dazzling smile.

"No, indeed; certainly not — it is quite satisfactory as it is, sir; no change is necessary," murmured Mrs. Marsh complacently, leading the way to the carriage.

Her Majesty is older now. She is plump, sleek, and of stately dignity, and her eyes — once turquoise — gleam with shifting amber lights. Her present realm is a certain mansion in Belgrave Square. Incidentally, it is also the home of the artist, Heywood, and of his wife, Dorothy.

The Heart of a Hunchback

I BOUGHT a curious old desk last week at a still more curious old shop on Third Avenue. That night, as I was gloating over my new treasure, I chanced upon an inner secret drawer; and there I found — torn straight across from top to bottom — a closely written manuscript.

Carefully matching the jagged edges together, I read this:

. . . . . .

So her name is Alice! It's a pretty name — but what is that to me? What have I to do with pretty names or pretty faces, or yet with pretty fancies?

To-night I saw in a magazine the advertisement of a "Memory System" — *a memory system!* If it were but to teach one how to forget — ah, that would be worth while!

Remember? What, indeed, do I not remember? — ah, yes; there are some few

things, after all. I do not remember kisses, save those of compassion; nor smiles, save those of pity. I do not remember romps and games, save those that bore for me defeat.

I do remember eyes, my mother's eyes, always mournful when turned on me; and other eyes, my father's, always quickly averted, if by chance they met my own. There were still other eyes, round, widely opened, curious, yet frightened, my playmate's eyes, always following me about with fascinated horror.

Was it the eyes that told me first I was not like other boys? Or was it — the mirror? The mirror was a fearful thing of shifting light and shadows. It reached from floor to ceiling in mother's room, and it said that one was small and ugly, and that one's head set far forward on shoulders that were high and squarely cut. It said that one's back was not straight and slender like John's or Dick's or Bill's, but that it crooked and curved and bunched into a great round knot below one's neck.

All this the mirror said; and after that the eyes — the mournful eyes, the averted eyes,

the round, curious eyes — all became as mirrors, and I saw myself in each and every one.

School? Ah, yes, I remember school. It was a thing of hard, high seats, and of boys and girls all tall, hopelessly tall; a thing of large round eyes, all mirrors, and of romps and races in which I alone had no part.

The lessons? They were only play to learn, but to recite — impossible! The states and rivers and rules and figures fled from my mind and left it blank the minute I rose to my feet. And yet, at examination time, in the seclusion that a paper and pencil gave me, I led my class with honors.

I was twelve when I heard this:

"Yes, it's a fine business Mr. Denton has built up. Too bad he has no son to carry on the good work."

There was silence for a moment, then a hesitating voice replied:

"Well, there's — Tom."

"Tom!" returned the other. "As if Tom could stand in his father's shoes! Why, man alive, what are you thinking of? Tom!"

I fled then. I was Tom.

So it was to be the same later on. Life was to be only another school full of romps and games in which I could have no part.

I think it was then that I came to see nothing in the world but backs. Not a man, woman, or child did I meet on the street that I did not gaze in fascination at that one's back. So many backs — so strong, so straight, so beautiful!

School was followed by college, and college was but school intensified. When it was over I took up law, just why I do not know, save that it gave me a chance to shut myself in rooms lined from floor to ceiling with books —books so closely laid that no space was left for mirrors.

And now from early morning until late at night I work and study, save that at four each day I walk in the Park. It was in the Park this afternoon that I saw — Alice.

She sat alone on one of the seats and I stood for a long while watching her from behind a screen of shrubs. Her pretty head was tilted back against a tree-trunk, and her brown hair flashed golden in the sunlight that came slant-

wise through the trees. Some dainty worsted stuff of pale blue lay in her lap, while her slender fingers toyed with two long knitting needles of ivory.

By and by a girl, older than she, came hurrying up the path and spoke to her.

"Am I late, Alice? Did you get tired waiting, dear?"

I did not hear the answer; but the long needles and the blue worsted were quickly hidden in a brown silk bag, and arm in arm the girls walked away.

I came back to my study then, but it looked gloomy and dark and lonely. For want of something better to do I have been writing all this down. I looked in my memory and opened the door to the past. The door is always ajar, but I have swung it wide open to-night.

Alice! But what, indeed, have I to do with pretty names, or pretty faces, or yet with pretty fancies?

This is not a diary; diaries have dates, and I have no use for dates. The weeks are all

alike to me; and yet — these last have been different. Is it, I wonder, because I mark each day with the hope of seeing Alice?

It is a month now since I first saw her, and every pleasant afternoon for four weeks I have been watching that seat in the Park.

Quite frequently I see her. Sometimes she is knitting; sometimes she is sitting idly thinking, as at first — but always her face is sweet and beautiful, and always it wears a look that helps me, somehow, to come back to my lonely room and begin my work again.

I wait until her friend joins her, and until they together have passed from sight, then I come boldly out in the open and walk by the seat.

Not for all the world would I pass that way and meet Alice face to face. Not for all the world would I see her clear eyes turn toward me — then widen in horror and pity. No — not for many worlds!

I went earlier to the Park to-day. Alice was not there at first, but she soon came, arm in arm with her friend, as usual. They always

walk arm in arm. I wonder why? The girl loves Alice, perhaps; it is not difficult to imagine the case.

They sat together for a minute, then the elder one rose and hurried away. By and by the blue worsted was taken from the bag, and the slender fingers flashed the long needles in and out. The ball rolled to the ground, and a kitten — which had strayed from some house on the avenue, perhaps — sprang out of the bushes and pounced upon the truant bit of blue.

Alice stopped her knitting and slipped her hand along the blue thread until it touched the soft gray fur.

"Kitty, kitty; come, kitty," I heard her coax softly.

The kitten rolled over and fiercely kicked the blue ball.

"You little rogue — give me my worsted!" commanded Alice.

The kitten rolled back again, relinquished the ball and caught the white hand with playful paws and teeth. In another moment the little creature was in the girl's lap, and Alice

was cooing and talking to her between loving pats and strokes.

And there they stayed — those two — until Alice's friend came up the path. When the girls walked away a minute later, they left on the wooden seat a disconsolate gray kitten looking after them with mournful eyes.

And I? What could *I* do but comfort the bereaved? *My* hand stroked the soft fur where hers had stroked, and my cheek rested against the smooth little head where hers had rested; and the cat purred on, nor seemed to know the change. Ah, foolish cat, and yet happy cat! — what would I not give for one caress such as had been lavished on that soft gray fur to-day!

For me? A caress for me? Of what, indeed, am I thinking!

Go, man, change your book-lined walls for mirrors. Go, walk abroad among your fellowmen and just look once in their eyes! A caress for you, indeed!

My brain is on fire, my hands tremble, and I can scarcely breathe; but I must write, even

though I am forced to resort to my old trick of using my left hand — my right wrist was sprained to-day.

I must put this thing into words, then look at them, study them, and understand what they mean.

When I reached the Park to-day, Alice was already there, laughing and playing with the kitten. The ball was half unwound, so that long coils of blue lay loosely over Alice's dress and over the grass at her feet. Suddenly the kitten, with the ball between her teeth, jumped to the ground, bounded across the path and the narrow strip of grass and into the roadway beyond.

Alice, with a laughing protest, sprang to her feet, and, passing the blue thread hand over hand, quickly reached the struggling, squirming bit of mischief, and dropped on her knees at its side.

It was then that I heard the wild clatter of an unguided horse's feet, and saw, coming around the curve above, a driverless horse and a swaying, empty carriage.

Alice gave a frightened little cry and rose

to her feet. The kitten scurried across the road into the bushes, but the girl stood irresolute.

In one awful moment I realized that the only thing that lay between her and possible death was my one puny arm. I could not reach the girl, but I might the horse. Oh, for the broad shoulders and strong grip of a man —not the feeble grasp of a pygmy!

I dashed across the grass and hurled myself at the beast, which seemed so hopelessly huge and untamable as it towered for an instant above me. I might as well have tried to check the speed of a cyclone. The animal shook me off as if I were a troublesome fly, and dashed headlong down the road. But that one instant of attack—feeble though it was —had caused him to swerve ever so slightly in his course, and only the wheel of the carriage grazed Alice's dress as he passed.

Over and over I rolled until I reached the gutter. As soon as possible I was on my feet and at Alice's side, steeling myself to meet the look I knew I should find in her eyes

"You are not hurt?" I faltered.

She turned toward me, her blue eyes frightened and widely opened.

"No — no — oh, no — I'm not hurt," she began tremulously; "but there was an accident, was there not? I — I should n't be here. I will go back to the seat," she added, reaching out both her hands and starting timidly forward.

And then I saw. *Alice was blind!*

What I said and did I hardly know. I only know that my heart leaped within me and that my brain seemed on fire. I threw up my head and walked on air as I led her back to the seat. I soothed and quieted her; I laughed, joked, told bits of stories, and drew her attention from the past unpleasantness. And all the while my heart sang a song of joy, God forgive me, a song of joy because Alice could not see!

For the first time in my life I came out of my miserable self and breathed and moved a free man. For the first time in my life I gave my wit and fancy full play. Then Alice's friend came up the path — and I knew that my clothing was soiled with the dust of the

road, that my coat was torn, my hat crushed, and that my right hand hung limp with a terrible pain.

The girl came quickly forward and put a protecting arm around Alice.

"Why, Alice!" she exclaimed, her eyes distrustfully bent on me.

"Oh, Rose, I'm so glad you have come!" cried Alice. "There was an accident, a runaway, and I was frightened. I had gone after the kitten, and this gentleman led me back to my seat!"

The girl called "Rose" came quickly toward me, the distrust all gone from her eyes, leaving only the pity and horror.

"But you are hurt, sir!" she cried. "Your hand! Your wrist!"

"Hurt—and you never told me!" exclaimed Alice in a voice that somehow set my blood to dancing.

I quieted their fears as best I could and turned away; but my blood is dancing still, and there is a wild, wild song in my heart, in spite of the pain in my wrist.

It is winter now, and the Park is silent and leafless. I have no need to visit it, nor to stand hungrily watching a certain seat therein. Instead, there is a cozy sitting-room with a brightly burning open fire, a sitting-room where I am always welcome, and where I may see Alice almost every day.

What care I now for mirror eyes? I walk abroad and scorn them. Do I not know where to look to meet no hateful image of pity?

I have learned from Alice many things. I have learned that, though the strong and the rich scorn to have the misshapen hunchback plead their case in court, they that are poor of purse would gladly claim his aid.

And they have it — these poor; my heart burns at their tales of wrong and injustice, and my tongue must be tipped with fire from the Heaven that favors the righteous cause, so often do I win for them the victory.

And all the days my heart is singing — for Alice is to be my wife. And why not? I will make her life a thing of love and peace, a thing set apart from every care. Her poor sightless eyes cannot know the ugly shape of the one

who loves her more and more with every throb of his heart.

And now I am glad of my inherited wealth, for money will buy the sweets of life for my Alice.

So all my days are a song till June — June, our wedding month.

Am I man or fiend? Have I sunk so low as to be now a thing of scorn even to myself? What is the meaning of this chilling numbness that sets my heart to beating in great, uneven throbs?

It is June. Alice has been away for weeks. A letter in her dear, labored hand received to-day says:

DARLING: I have a surprise for you — the dearest, most wonderful surprise in the world. All these weeks I have been under a famous oculist's care, and, dear heart, I 'm going to see! To see!

Do you know? — Can you imagine what that is to me? Only think! To see the blue of the sky, the green of the earth, and, best of all, your own dear face and loving eyes!

I 'm going home to-morrow. Come to see me. Come quickly, for I shall wear the bandage across my face until you yourself remove it. I want the

first thing I see at home to be the joy and love in your eyes. Come.

Your own ALICE

Good God! Is my love then so poor a thing that it would close again my sweetheart's eyes? Would I keep from her gaze the whole beautiful world, simply that she might not behold my own ugliness.

I can see the eyes now. I can look far down in their clear blue depths. I see love, then pity, then horror. No longer may I turn to them to find rest and comfort. They, too, are mirrors, mirrors like all the rest.

It is the end. Once more I shall walk alone. Once more I shall watch my darling from afar, for never after this day will I thrust *my* face between her new-born sight and the beautiful, beautiful world.

I go now to Alice.

. . . . . .

And there the manuscript ended. I turned it about and twisted it from side to side, but not another word could I find. Then I shut it up in its drawer and tried to forget it; but it haunted my days and visited my dreams until

I could neither work nor sleep. At last, I hurried down to the little shop on Third Avenue and sought the proprietor.

"I bought a desk here a week ago — an old desk with curious carvings, and odd little drawers at the side," I began. "Can you tell me to whom it belonged?"

"Yes, I remember," returned the old man, a pecular smile on his face. "It was once the property of Denton, the hunchback lawyer. He freshened up his office not long ago, and sold this desk to me. Perhaps you have heard of Denton? His fame is growing of late. There was a time when his unfortunate affliction caused him to have only the meanest, most unprofitable of cases. Now, there is n't a man in the city that would n't jump at the chance of his aid. More than half his time, however, is still given to righting poor men's wrongs."

"He must be a wonderful man," I ventured.

"He is — all thanks to the devoted encouragement of a good wife."

My heart leaped.

"Then he 's married!" I faltered.

"To the best and truest little woman in the world. I know, for I've watched her from babyhood up." The old man paused a moment, then turned to me, a strange light in his faded blue eyes. "Madam, you're a writer of tales, they tell me; but your liveliest fancy never pictured a story with more real heart and romance in it than there is in that man's life.

"As I said," he continued musingly, "Denton is a hunchback, and he has always been morbidly sensitive in regard to his personal appearance. Alice, his wife, was blind when he first knew and courted her; and because she could not see, he showed to her — and to her alone — the depths of his real self. When Alice's sight was restored, she insisted that her lover should be the one to remove the final bandage from her eyes, and my wife — who was in the room at the time — said she never saw a man whose face expressed such hopeless misery as Denton's at that minute. But Alice just looked at him; a long, loving look that never faltered."

"And he?"

"He took her in his arms with a great sob of joy."

"And then?" I prompted eagerly.

The old man turned with mild reproach in his eyes.

"And then—my wife left the room," he said gently.

Polly's Christmas Surprise

ON the top of two hills they lived — Miss Polly and Old Heminway.

Fifteen years before, they had been Polly Armstrong, village belle, and John Heminway, the best "catch" in town. They had been lovers, too, as all Springvale knew; also, that there had been a quarrel, apparently a most bitter one. At all events, the engagement had been declared broken, and never once in all those fifteen years had Polly Armstrong and John Heminway been known to speak to each other. Once the path between the two houses had been kept well worn by the journeys of John to his sweetheart's door.

The change in the two characters had begun at once, though not for some years had the townspeople realized it. Then suddenly they became aware that Polly Armstrong was "Miss Polly," a gentle-faced, wistful-eyed woman to whom the entire town took its griefs

and joys, with the certainty of obtaining prompt aid and sympathetic interest; and that John Heminway had become "Old Heminway," stern-visaged and morose, a young man still, but prematurely old, who scowled at the world in a manner to drive every living thing but his mother and his dog to seek any company but his.

It was thus that matters stood early in December when Mrs. Dysart, who had been Rose Cooper, bought a spool of brown silk at Harlow's, Springvale's general store.

"What's this I hear, Mis' Dysart, about a surprise present for Miss Polly?" beamed proprietor Harlow, who had sprung to wait upon his pretty customer. "They say you're getting it up."

"Yes!—sh-h!" Rose Dysart brought her finger to her lips. "But then, there is n't any one here who would tell, of course," she added, with a brightly confiding glance at the five men and two women in the store.

The women murmured a hasty "Of course not;" but they colored faintly, and threw a hurried glance at the tall figure of the man

standing at the grocery counter not far away. The men, too, looked quickly in the same direction; but Mrs. Dysart went on artlessly:

"You see, it's this way." She smiled straight into proprietor Harlow's eyes as she spoke. "*You* know how good Miss Polly is, and how we all run to her with everything — every last one of us. Well, I never thought until last Christmas how it must be for *her* — how *she* might feel about it, I mean.

"I was showing her my presents, my Christmas presents, and my — my wedding presents; and I suppose I was running on rather thoughtlessly — for they are nice, you know — when I saw a queer little look come into her eyes, as if — well, I didn't quite know what it meant; but I blurted right out: 'I suppose I'm silly, Miss Polly, but you'd be proud of them if they were yours, wouldn't you.'

"I saw then what that look meant. It was a hungry look — a regular starved look. The next minute it was gone, and she was laughing a little oddly, and saying: 'No doubt I should, my dear! But, you know, I haven't had a

Christmas present for a dozen years or more, and of course, as I never had a wedding present, I don't believe I know how I ought to feel, after all.'"

Mrs. Dysart paused for breath; her audience caught theirs. A sharp clatter of tin from the grocery counter told them that the sugar scoop had dropped from nervous fingers to the floor. An audible little gasp told that at least one of the women had quite lost her self-control for a moment. A half-suppressed chuckle behind a sandy mustache told that, to one of the idlers by the stove, there was something exquisitely funny in the telling of this story on one side of the stove, while on the other a certain frowning man waited fumingly for what was plainly his week's supply of groceries.

To all this, however, the little bride was deaf and blind. Mrs. Dysart had not lived in town long. She knew nothing about the village belle, the town's best catch, the well-worn path through the woods and fields, or the fifteen-year-old quarrel. Blithely, therefore, she went on with her story.

"Even then, I don't think I should have thought anything — we're so used to Miss Polly's always giving, and never receiving — if that night I had n't happened to read something that made me see how hard it must have been, sometimes, for Miss Polly to — to rejoice with us. Not but that she's done it, always, like the dear she is, you know. But this article declared that it took more real grace sometimes to rejoice with one over his good luck than it did to cry with one over his misfortunes, especially if your own heart was aching.

"Now, I don't know, of course, that Miss Polly's heart aches, but I do know that she can't have anything real exciting to rejoice at, living as she does all alone with her father at the top of that hill. And I just made up my mind that she should have something; and that's when I thought of the present."

"The 'present'! But I thought 't was more than one," ventured one of the women. "I heard 't was."

Mrs. Dysart turned quickly.

"It is," she cried. "That's where the fun

comes in. It's a surprise present — thirty presents in one. One for each day in the month, all labeled and dated, and she must n't open them except when the label says she may. Don't you see? She 'll have thirty days of Christmas presents, to make up for all those years she says she has n't had one!

"So I 'm collecting them now. I 've got ten. They 're all nice, and some of them are lovely. I 've got a beautiful handkerchief, a nice book, a dear little lace tie, and a perfect beauty of a bead bag, besides other things," exulted Mrs. Dysart, picking up her purchases and preparing to go. "Now, you won't tell, so it would reach *her* ears — I expect every one else to know, of course. And if any of you have anything to give, why, just send it to me." She laughed over her shoulder as she opened the outer door.

A half-minute later a scowling, stern-faced man stalked out of the same door, and banged it behind him. In the store he left a babel of tongues let loose.

It seemed to John Heminway that, after that evening's purchase of groceries at Har-

low's store, there was nothing talked of in town but Miss Polly's surprise present, and it disturbed him not a little.

More often than ever, now, in the evening, Heminway would stand at his window in the front of the house and watch the light in what he knew was the living-room window of the house on the opposite hill. Sometimes his eyes softened as he looked; more often they hardened somberly under the scowling brows. There were memories both sweet and bitter connected with that light, — sweet, because in the old days the light lifted high in the gable window of the attic meant that Polly Armstrong would be graciously at home to John Heminway that evening; bitter, because after the quarrel nothing quite so emphasized the utter dreariness of the world as did the unchanging darkness of that attic window.

To be sure, on one night, two weeks after the quarrel, there *had* been a light there; and palpitatingly John Heminway had hurried over — only to be tersely informed by Polly's father that Polly was up in the garret hunting for a masquerade costume, and begged to be

excused. John had gone home then, his head in the air, thoroughly angry with himself for showing so plainly that he had even looked toward that attic window.

It was easy, after that, to be what Polly had said he was — as hard and as unyielding as a stone. Polly did not say such things usually; but she had said this very easily on the day of the quarrel. John Heminway remembered it well. She was in the Armstrong kitchen, preparing peaches for preserving, and all around her lay the pink and yellow fruit in luscious profusion. Deftly, with a small knife, she was removing the stones from the peaches, and it was one of these she held up as she spoke.

"You are as hard and unyielding as — as this peach stone, John Heminway — you are!" she cried in a hot burst of anger — and Polly Armstrong was so seldom angry.

"Very well; so be it," he had retorted. "I'll not have the name without the game. I will be unyielding."

At once Polly had turned as if in affright.

"But, John, you don't mean that you won't

try to see it from my standpoint — that you won't ever give up — just a little!"

"Oh, yes, I'll give up," he had answered, grimly; "I'll give up when — when peaches give up their stones!"

He had said it because his eyes were still on the peach stone in her hands, and because his ears were still tingling with her taunting reference to it. Afterward — long years afterward — when he read one day in a newspaper that a plant wizard had made a peach grow without its stone, he remembered that speech of his, and wondered if Polly Armstrong had seen the notice, too; and if so, what she thought. He even cut the notice out and put it carefully away between the leaves of his little-read Bible — but there the matter ended; the quarrel was more than a dozen years old by that time, and peace at such a late date was, to the mind of John Heminway, out of the question.

Nearly three years had passed since then, and now once more the newspaper notice was in his mind, chiefly because Polly Armstrong, too, was in his mind. How could she help

being there, indeed, when on all sides he met either her name, or an embarrassed silence that spoke her name even more loudly than did the wagging tongues?

All Springvale felt it that year — the peculiar exaltation and expectation of something untried, uncommon, almost unreal; something that, while affording delightful excitement, gave at the same time a most pleasant feeling of complacency, that comes only with the consciousness of duty well performed. The immediate cause of it all was, of course, the surprise present that the town, through Mrs. Dysart, was to give Miss Polly; but the results were most astonishingly far-reaching. According to Seth Harlow it seemed as if "the angel of peace was just a-shakin' his wings till the feathers dropped out all over town;" which was merely Seth Harlow's way of saying that never in his experience had there been so few quarrels started, so many old ones patched up. It would not surprise him, he added soberly, to see even Miss Polly and Old Heminway walking arm in arm down the street. But, even as he spoke, the chuckle and

the wink that followed his words gave the lie to his assertion.

If, in truth, John Heminway did feel a subtle something in the air those early December days, no living creature knew it, unless perhaps it was his mother or his dog. His mother knew that John was "turrible touchy," and the dog knew that silence and unappreciative apathy greeted his most joyous barks of welcome and his most eager tail-waggings.

And yet—

Every night now, John Heminway stole to the front of the house and watched that light on the opposite hill; and every day, once and again, he fingered a yellowed newspaper clipping that lay between two leaves of his Bible.

It was on the tenth of December that John Heminway had dispatched his first incoherent, beseeching letter to the plant wizard who had grown a peach without any stone; but it was not until the morning of the twentieth that he was able at last to send to Mrs. Dysart a small package addressed to Miss Polly Armstrong. Then, palpitating from his efforts, and faint with the terror that had been his lest those

efforts should be, after all, too late, John Heminway waited.

With good reason now, and with a wild hope in his heart, he watched nightly for the light in the attic window. He had forgotten, for the moment, that Miss Polly's gifts were dated by Mrs. Dysart, and that not for some days, perhaps, might she come to his. As the nights passed, therefore, and no light appeared, he almost lost his heart, and quite lost his temper. To think that after all these years he had given in — and for this!

The fact that all the town was abuzz with Miss Polly's present did not help John Heminway in the least. Everywhere he heard it: how pleased she had been when Mrs. Dysart went up to her house with the presents, and how excited she was when she realized that for a whole month there would be for her a brand-new surprise every morning. What he did not hear, however, was that the full number of presents had been complete when his own arrived on the twentieth day of December; and that it was only because of a last moment's brilliant inspiration that Mrs. Dy-

sart had added this final mysterious gift to the lot, making the round total of thirty-one — which was, after all, "only a month," she said to herself.

For three nights, therefore, John Heminway — growing daily more angry, more disdainful, more shamefaced, and more despairing — arrayed himself in his Sunday coat and his best necktie, and watched the attic window of the little house on the opposite hill. He told himself each night that he was a fool, and that of course the light would not be there. But not until the night before Christmas Eve came and went, profitless, did he realize how deep within him had been the conviction that the attic window signal would be sure, sooner or later, to greet his expectant eyes.

More bitterly than ever, then, he berated himself for a fool. When Christmas Eve came he did not don the Sunday coat nor the best tie. He did, however — merely to emphasize his scorn for himself — stride to the front of the house and glare across at the attic window. And the light was there!

Twice John Heminway rubbed his eyes and

looked again; then he turned and dashed upstairs.

It was no Old Heminway now. It was a boy with erect shoulders and uplifted chin; a boy who tossed his neckties about with youthful abandon, and brushed his coat to within an inch of its life; and who, when finally ready, leaped down the stairs two steps at a time.

Five minutes after John Heminway had left the house, the telephone bell rang. John's mother answered it.

"Hello," she quavered a little uncertainly. John's mother never answered the telephone when John was in the house, and it rang very seldom anyway.

"Is that you, Mis' Heminway — Mary?" called an almost equally uncertain masculine voice.

The woman swayed dizzily, and caught at a chair-back for support.

"Why, y-yes! P-Peter!"

No wonder Mary Heminway stammered, and clung to a chair-back for support. The voice was that of Peter Armstrong; and it had

been fifteen years since she and Peter had spoken to each other.

"Well, Mary, has anything happened over there to your place—anything queer? I mean, is John at home?"

"Why, no, he ain't, Peter—and I was a-wonderin'. He tore upstairs like mad a little while ago; but in 'most no time he was down again, and off without a word."

An unmistakable chuckle sounded across the wires.

"Well, Mary, he's started for here!"

"For there! Peter!"

"Well, he has. Let me tell ye. You know about that 'ere continued-story present that Polly's been gettin', of course? Every one does. Well, to-night's surprise party turned out to be a little glass preserve jar with two whole peaches a-floatin' in some sugary syrup.

"I noticed Polly looked queer when she see the writtin'. She seemed either just plain mad, or terrible hurt—I could n't tell which—when she opened up the bundle. But she only said: 'It's preserves, father. Some one

has sent us some peach preserves for our Christmas Eve supper.'

"Well, for a while she would n't touch hers. Then by and by she picks up her spoon and cuts down hard through her peach; and I thought then it *was* mad she was, sure enough. But the next minute she give a little cry and began to cut that peach into smithereens, with never a taste carried to her mouth.

"'Why, father, father,' she calls out, 'there is n't — there is n't any there! It 's a peach that has given up its stone!' and then, if she does n't jump up from the table, catch up one of the lighted lamps, and fairly run upstairs.

"When she comes back a minute later, she 's left the lamp; but she whisks the dishes off the table, and skips up to her room without waiting to do them, for all the world as she used to when she was sixteen and expectin' a beau. Even then I did n't understand what was up, till comin' in from the barn I see a light in the attic window. I knew then. She *was* expectin' a beau, an' 't was your John. Somehow he 'd got a message to her, and she 'd answered it with that light."

"Oh, Peter, really—*really?* Why, then they'll—make up!" Mary Heminway's voice broke in almost a sob.

"Yes, an' Mary—"

"Yes, Peter," faintly.

"I was a-thinkin'. You know 't was *us* they quarreled over."

"I s'pose so, Peter." The voice was very faint now.

"Of course 't was. Polly wanted John to come here and live with us, and he would n't."

"Of course he would n't," retorted Mary Heminway, with some spirit. "Of course he would n't, after—after the way *you'd* treated *me!*"

"But I did n't treat you," argued the other, with equal spirit; "it was *you* that treated me! And that 's why Polly would n't do what John wanted, and go and live at your house with him and you. She could n't—she said she just could n't when you—but, oh, shucks, Mary! this ain't what I was goin' ter say at all. This ain't no way to—to make up."

"To—to m-make up!" echoed the woman.

Could this be Peter Armstrong talking? Mary Heminway shut her eyes for a moment and tried to realize what was happening.

"Yes, to make up," retorted the man with emphasis. "Look a-here, Mary, we ain't old! We ain't sixty yet, and life ain't done for either of us. What's the use of fightin'? Look at the children. Polly tripped through here like a sixteen-year-old girl a little bit ago, in spite of her thirty-five years. She's got on her white muslin, even if the snow *is* on the ground, an' she's waitin' in the parlor right this minute for your boy.

"Of course, just how they'll settle things I don't know. But they'll settle 'em some way, don't you forget it! Those fifteen years of misery haint been for nothin'. And say, Mary, we've been miserable for twenty years —you and me— When you come to think of it, how foolish it all was from the start!"

"But—but—" stammered Mary Heminway.

"Oh, yes," interrupted the man. "I know some of the things you'll say, of course. But just think, Mary, how easy we can help the

children by just tellin' 'em that they need n't worry about us, because we 've decided to take *one* of the houses, and leave the other to them, and —"

"*Peter!*"

"Oh, yes, I know, but — Mary, I 've got lots to say, and — and I 'm comin' over. You don't mind that, do you?"

"Why, n-no, but —"

"Then I 'm comin'," interposed a joyfully certain voice.

With a little tremulous gasp Mary Heminway hung up her receiver.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh-h! He 's — *coming!*"

Then, swiftly, she sped to the little mirror over the kitchen shelf. She caught sight of her shining eyes, as young as Polly's.

"John and Polly 's made up," she whispered, "an' everything 's coming right! I 'm glad, I 'm glad, for friends an' lovers shouldn't be parted — on Christmas Eve."

Nuts to Crack and Mary Ellen

AT five years of age Mary Ellen ate and played what, when, and where her mother dictated; at ten she scarcely saw anything that was not within the limits of vision prescribed by her mother, and at fifteen she did not even think, save along the lines laid down by that same parent. At this time, gingham-aproned and pigtailed, she still played dolls in the attic and read the juvenile page in the magazines — not because the dolls or the pictured brownies had any special charm for her, but because her mother bought the dolls and handed her the magazines with that particular page uppermost.

It was on her eighteenth birthday that, for the first time, a young man laughingly superseded her girl companions and walked all the way home from church at her side. Not only was this the first time, however, that such a

thing occurred, but it bid fair to be the last — youths of twenty-one do not like to be led by the ear off a young woman's doorstep by the young woman's irate mother; certainly Jared Cunningham did not.

Mary Ellen, still tingling with the curious ecstasy that had been hers from the moment of leaving the church doors, was sent at once to her room with the scathing reprimand, —

"You silly child—as if you were old enough for that sort of thing!"

Jared Cunningham was but a visitor in Hanford, for which Mary Ellen was devoutly grateful. She had only to stay indoors a week before she heard he had left the place. In Mary Ellen's estimation, prompt and ignominious death would have been her portion had she once met the scornful eyes of that young man.

At twenty-one Mary Ellen's face was prettily pink and white, her figure gracefully slender, and her hair broken into numberless kinks and curls of gold about a wide, serene brow. No lines of thought nor wrinkles of care marred that fair face. How could there be

thought when Mary Ellen had never been allowed to choose between even white bread and brown bread at the table? How could there be care when she had never been asked to decide between even a pink and a blue ribbon for her hair?

Mrs. Knowlton, Mary Ellen's mother, was tall, square-shouldered, and forceful. Her face was deeply lined and her lips drawn down at the corners as if with the weight of years and nations; in reality, it was only with the weight of Mary Ellen. It was a serious thing indeed, according to Mrs. Knowlton, to bring up a fatherless child, even though that child were a girl — and docile.

The spring that Mary Ellen was twenty-one something happened at the great house next door to their modest cottage; the owner died, and the house passed into the hands of an aggressive, middle-aged woman, who promptly whitewashed, painted, and papered the large, airy rooms, so long unused, and flung the whole place wide open to summer boarders.

It was a wonderful world that dawned on

Mary Ellen then—a world by day of golf-clubs, tennis rackets, short-skirted women, and flanneled men, a world by night of music, lights, and glimpses into a marvelous fairyland.

A high green hedge separated the Knowlton yard and flower-garden from the neighboring close-cropped lawn, and the west wing of the great house came almost out to the boundary hedge, so that guests having rooms in the end of this wing could feast their senses of sight and smell on the Knowlton pinks and roses.

At eight o'clock each pleasant morning Mary Ellen gathered flowers for the cottage; at nine she sprayed the roses and waged uncompromising warfare on slugs and bugs; and at ten she weeded the beds. In the afternoon she carried her sewing or her book to the rustic seat beneath the maple-tree that grew close to the boundary hedge, and there she sat until sunset. It was at two o'clock upon one such day that a sheet of note paper fluttered out of an upper window of the great house, circled about in the air, then settled at Mary Ellen's feet.

"Why, where—" began Mary Ellen, and promptly picked it up.

Across the page, in letters so bold and plain she could not fail to read them, were these words: "And so I watch her each day—my 'Lady of the Garden.' She's prettiest in white with a touch of blue—just the match of her eyes—in her hair. The garden is next door, and—"

"It went over this hedge, I think," said a clear, masculine voice. "It must have, for it blew out of my window just above, and it is n't in sight on this side."

"Oh!" gasped Mary Ellen, flinging the paper away with a sweep of her hand, and watching it with startled eyes as it fell not far from the hedge.

"I can see it, I think," continued the voice, this time muffled and apparently from under the hedge. "Ah, ha!" it finished gleefully, as long fingers and a longer arm slid across the grass and dragged the paper out of sight.

There was a moment's hesitation, then Mary Ellen dropped to her knees and peered through a small, jagged hole in the hedge.

A man, tall, broad-shouldered, and bareheaded, was swinging across the lawn — his back towards her — carrying in his hand a sheet of white note-paper. Near by were two girls playing tennis.

"Mary Ellen!" called a voice from the cottage.

There was no answer.

"Mary *El*-len!" called the voice again.

The voice sounded nearer. Mary Ellen sprang to her feet and turned her back to the hole in the hedge.

"Yes, mother."

Mrs. Knowlton came around the corner of the summerhouse.

"I want you to go downtown and match this worsted," she said a little breathlessly. "Try Kenny's, then Durgin's. Don't go anywhere else. You ought to do that in forty minutes."

"Very well, mother," said the girl, taking the sample and turning away.

A frown and a pout disfigured Mary Ellen's face — a most unusual occurrence. Twenty minutes later both frown and pout had dis-

appeared — Mary Ellen was leaving the house clad in a crisp white gown, with a knot of blue showing beneath her hatbrim.

Forty minutes later than this — in an hour all told — Mary Ellen handed her mother the worsted.

"You've been gone a whole — why, *Mary* Ellen!" broke off Mrs. Knowlton, aghast.

A queer little thrill tingled to Mary Ellen's finger-tips, bringing a deeper pink to her cheeks.

"Isn't it right — the shade? I found it at Durgin's."

"But — your gown!" gasped Mrs. Knowlton.

"My — gown?" repeated Mary Ellen, again conscious of that queer little tremor.

"You had on your pink-sprigged muslin."

"Oh, yes," smiled Mary Ellen, trying to speak unconcernedly. "It wasn't quite fresh; I changed it."

"Fresh, *fresh!*" cried Mrs. Knowlton. "Who said it wasn't fresh? As if I didn't know when you needed to change your dress!"

"But, mother, I —"

"Now go straight upstairs and take this off."

"But I want—"

"Not another word, my daughter."

"But the other is—"

"Mary!"—in Mrs. Knowlton's case it was the shortening, not the lengthening, of the name that signified.

"Yes, mother," choked Mary Ellen as she turned and left the room.

Mary Ellen was thoroughly frightened at herself during the next few minutes, so fierce was the rage that shook her whole slender figure as she unhooked that crisp white gown.

After that day the garden grew even more attractive to Mary Ellen. The flowers, the bugs, the weeds, and the beds—each claimed a little added time, and the girl came almost to live out-of-doors. Mrs. Knowlton not only approved, but encouraged. Mary Ellen looked pale, she said; Mary Ellen needed the outdoor exercise. Had Mrs. Knowlton known that a part of the "exercise" consisted in kneeling for long, rapt minutes before a certain hole

in her hedge, it is doubtful if the conclusion would have been the same — but Mrs. Knowlton did not know; the hole in the hedge was well screened from the house.

It was wonderful how much could be seen through one small hole, Mary Ellen thought. To be sure, it was just a bit larger now than at first, through a cautious picking away of the inner leaves by venturesome brown fingers. Tennis must be a fascinating game indeed, so constantly was the court in demand. The young women were pretty, and interesting to watch; but it was toward the stalwart, bare-headed men that Mary Ellen's eyes were oftenest turned — and toward their backs, not their faces.

Which one of those men had lost and found that letter? Which one had written of her as the "Lady of the Garden"? Which one had said that white — white and blue most became her? Was it the tall, light-haired one? Was it the one with the brown eyes and the pointed brown beard? Was it the one with the red mustache? In vain Mary Ellen tried to picture each striding across the lawn with a bit

of white paper in his hand; her mind refused to come to a decision.

It was quite a week after the worsted had been matched that Mary Ellen hurried into the garden one day and dropped on her knees before the hole in the hedge. She looked straight into a pair of startled brown eyes.

"Oh!" cried Mary Ellen, springing to her feet.

An inarticulate murmur came from the other side of the hedge, but Mary Ellen did not wait to hear. She turned and fled; nor did she go into the garden again that day.

The next morning the flowers, the bugs, the weeds, and the beds were all attended to before Mary Ellen even looked once toward the hole in the hedge. But when at last her eyes, refusing longer to obey her will, turned of themselves toward the magnet, they opened wide with fascinated terror at sight of a folded bit of paper carefully laid in the opening.

What a bold, bad, presumptuous man! Of course, she should not touch it! How dared he think for a moment that she would!

Mary Ellen advanced and sat down on the rustic seat, her eyes still fixed on the paper. For a time she sat motionless, then she threw a hurried glance about her. Stealthily she rose to her feet and tiptoed to the hole in the hedge. Still more stealthily she reached for the letter.

Surely, it would do no harm just to read it! — she could put it back again!

"To the Lady of the Garden," breathed Mary Ellen, her eyes on the address. "Then it was he — the brown-eyed one! It's the very same handwriting."

With shaking fingers she unfolded the paper and disclosed these words:

Will the Lady of the Garden forgive the Penitent Culprit? And yet — the Culprit could almost wish that tennis balls be lost each day if the search for them would always bring to his eyes so delightful a vision as that of yesterday.

"Oh!" cried Mary Ellen softly, the somewhat fancifully worded note appealing to her romance-hungry soul as a more prosaic one could not have done. "Oh, how lovely! — and to *me!*" And she read the words again.

Suddenly she straightened herself and forced her lips into stern lines. With deliberate care she folded the paper and laid it back in the hedge. To Mary Ellen it looked exactly as it did before; but to the man who came to the hedge at dusk that night it did not — there was no small twig laid across its white surface now, and the brown eyes flashed with triumph.

Neither flower nor bug, neither bed nor weed, could keep Mary Ellen's glance from the hole in the hedge the next morning. The folded white paper was gone, but in its place lay a pale blue one. There was not even a moment's hesitation this time; Mary Ellen walked straight to the hedge and pulled the note from its hiding-place. She did not notice that as she did so a dried leaf slipped off the paper and dropped to the ground below. A moment later Mary Ellen's eager eyes read this:

Blue being the color best suited to the Lady of the Garden, perhaps her eyes will rest more favorably upon my plea for pardon if I present it to her on that shade of paper. Perhaps, even, she may grant

me a bit of a written word that will tell me she forgives me for the stolen glimpse I caught of her paradise when I sought for the lost tennis ball two days ago.

A Most Penitent Culprit.

Two, three, four times Mary Ellen read the note, then she folded it and laid it carefully in place again. There was a light in her eyes and a flush on her cheeks that said much; there was a reluctance in her movements and a gentleness in her fingers that said more.

On the next day and the next no letter lay waiting in the hedge post-office (oh, the wisdom of the Penitent Culprit!), though Mary Ellen haunted the place like an uneasy spirit, even stealing out in the moonlight to look for one. On the third day a white note, topped with a huge red rose, greeted her eyes and was soon clutched in her fingers. Mary Ellen read palpitatingly:

Ah, cruel Lady of the Garden, to thus scorn my humble suit for pardon. Twice have I appealed in vain to your unseeing eyes. [Mary Ellen smiled and uptilted her chin.] And now have I asked this rose to catch and hold your glance in hopes that the missive beneath it may meet the favor of your

perusal. ["Oh, how beautiful!" breathed Mary Ellen.] 'And because a tennis ball was lost, must I forever remain in your remembrance as a rude trespasser on your privacy — a boorish creature who feasts his eyes on stolen visions of loveliness? Ah, no! I will not believe that so fair a face belongs to so hard a heart. A white rose laid in the hedge will tell me that you understand and forgive. A white rose, remember. Surely, a favor so small for you, so great to me, you'll not fail to grant!

A Sorrowing Yet Hopeful Culprit.

Mary Ellen stood quite still for a moment; then she fingered the red rose and eyed the hole in the hedge. Very slowly she folded the note and laid it back in the hedge with the rose on top; then she sat down on the rustic seat.

Put a white rose there for that unknown, brown-eyed man? Indeed, no! As if she, Mary Ellen Knowlton, could be guilty of so dreadful a thing! And yet — she wondered if, had her decision been otherwise, there would have been a white rose suitably fine to give. She might look; there surely could be no harm in that!

Some minutes later the note and the red flower had disappeared from the hole in the

hedge; in their place was a beautiful, half-opened white rose.

Was it two days afterwards, or three, that there came that letter begging for just a word with her — a spoken word face to face? Of course, the hole in the hedge was out of the question — if on Mary Ellen's side it was screened from view, on his it most certainly was not.

But there was the gate just behind the summerhouse — he only awaited her gracious leave; and, after all, it was necessary, absolutely necessary, that he should speak to her. Only one little moment — he would not delay her long. Would she not write just a word? — the hour, two, three, four o'clock, when she should be at leisure? She had been so kind, so good. She would not refuse him this!

Wednesday afternoons Mrs. Knowlton nearly always passed with a friend; and it was on a Wednesday at two that the little back gate of the summerhouse opened, and a brown-eyed, brown-bearded man passed through and walked up the path toward the

summerhouse. Inside he came face to face with a trembling, wide-eyed girl.

"My Lady of the Garden!" he began softly, baring his head and bowing low before her. "You did come!"

"Oh, no, I didn't," stammered Mary Ellen; "that is, I'm here to tell you that I'm not coming. You must go away."

"Away!"

"Yes. I—I came to tell you that I didn't want to hear anything you had come to say."

"Ah, cruel, cruel Lady of the Garden," murmured the man. There was a slight pause.

"Well, aren't you—going?" faltered Mary Ellen.

For answer the man turned and walked slowly to the door. The girl behind him noted the length and strength of limb, the proud poise of the head, the glint of gold where the sun touched the brown hair.

"Did you find the—ball?" she almost whispered.

Low as the words were the man heard. He turned, his hand seeking his pointed brown beard to hide the smile of the lips beneath.

"DID YOU FIND THE— BALL?"

"No," he said. "Did you?"

She shook her head.

"You play tennis, perhaps," he hazarded.

Again Mary Ellen gave the mute denial, but the longing in her eyes needed no words to carry its message.

"Perhaps you'll let me teach you?" he suggested.

"Oh, if I only could!" cried Mary Ellen.

It was easy after that. On the one hand was the rapturous ecstasy of listening to tales of a dreamed-of, longed-for life; on the other was the enchantment of bringing to wistful blue eyes new lights and to tremulous red lips new curves. And if it was easier on that first Wednesday, how vastly more so was it in the wonderful days that followed!

Missionary meetings, lawn fairs, and garden fêtes took much of Mrs. Knowlton's time during the next few weeks, and Mary Ellen was left more than was usual to her own devices. Other days, as well as Wednesdays, saw the fascinating story-teller and the fascinated listener together in the summerhouse; and if for any reason that place of meeting

failed them, there was yet the hole in the hedge for letters.

To Richard Lloyd the thing presented a novelty that brought a potent charm. Not that he was a stranger to clandestine meetings and secret letters — the novelty lay in the guileless innocence and transparent adoration of Mary Ellen. From the first Lloyd had given his fancy full rein in watching this fair-haired, blue-eyed maid walking each day among the roses beneath his window, and he had made frequent mention of "My Lady of the Garden" in his letters to his friends. There was little of interest, and there was less of excitement, in Lloyd's present existence, but there was promise of both now that his dream-maiden had become a woman of flesh and blood. Regardless of conventionalities and heedless of results, Lloyd pursued his new pastime with all the skill that years of world-training and woman-wooing had made his.

To joyless, pleasure-hungry Mary Ellen existence became a thing of vision-filled days and dream-haunted nights. The good-looking

young man and his stories of the life outside her green hedge became one and the same to her, and she worshiped him as the incarnation of all the delights of the mysterious, longed-for world. Under the skillful guidance of his imagination she saw herself the center of an admiring throng, sole mistress of her own will, free to drive, ride, motor, and with all America and Europe for a playground. To a young woman who could not go to the village post-office without permission the visions and dreams were alluring.

To be free—*free!*

And it was no impossibility—it was even a certainty, Lloyd told her. She had only to go with him. Just one strong, brave act on her part, one wrenching away from the iron grip that held her. She had but to steal from the house some night and meet him at the turn of the road. The rest would be for him to do. He would make all arrangements. Her comfort and happiness would then be quite in his hands, and surely she must know how tenderly those hands would guard and care for a burden so precious as was her happiness!

All this was not told to Mary Ellen at once. There was no indecent haste; there was no rush of impetuous pleading. There were the glance of the eye, the touch of the hand, the turn of a phrase — each growing in tenderness day by day. There was the kiss: first on the finger-tips, then on the brow, the cheek, the lips. Once only did the man blunder. It was when he caught the girl in his arms and pressed burning lips to her eyes, her mouth, and her soft white throat. Mary Ellen broke from his clasp and fled to the farthest corner of the summerhouse, standing at bay with terror-filled eyes and heaving bosom.

"I — I'm going back to the house," she panted. "I — I'm sure it isn't right for me to meet you!"

The man's face changed instantly. The fire in his eyes gave way to a tender reproach.

"Not right, sweetheart? — not *right?*"

She shook her head.

He took one step nearer, but at her shuddering recoil he fell back to his old position.

"Sweetheart," he began very gently, "haven't you promised to be my wife?"

"Y-yes," faltered Mary Ellen.

"Haven't you a perfect right to meet me, then?"

"Per-haps."

"Is there any one that has a better?"

"Why, n-no."

"Then come here and sit down; won't you, dear?"

Very slowly Mary Ellen crossed the floor and sat down a little apart from him. Gradually the frightened look died from her eyes and the tense lines left her lips; but when Lloyd said good-bye that night he dared only to kiss her finger-tips.

When at last the time came that Mary Ellen actually agreed to meet Lloyd at the turn of the road on a certain Tuesday night, she herself hardly knew how it came about. Her senses were in a curious whirl these days. Nothing was very clear save the fact of her coming freedom. In those wondrous visions and dreams of hers she was dimly conscious that Lloyd was beside her—he must be; it was through him that the dreams were to become a reality—but his form was never distinct,

and his presence, if dwelt upon, brought a vague unrest. She therefore concentrated her attention upon other details of the picture.

When the appointed night came Mary Ellen had less difficulty than she had expected to have in stealing away. Mrs. Knowlton retired that evening at eight o'clock with a severe headache, expressing regrets that she could not make her accustomed visit to see that Mary Ellen was covered with the proper bedclothing. Mary Ellen had no need to undress, consequently, and could pack her traveling-bag in unfrightened leisure.

At twelve a hooded, cloaked figure slipped out of the side door, hurried down the path, and stole hesitatingly along the walk in the dense shadows of the maples. Slowly and yet more slowly moved the figure — Mary Ellen's heart was failing her. This fearsome deed and this fearsome darkness — if only it could have been done in the sunlight! Mary Ellen stopped, her hand to her throat. She had turned about when a low voice spoke in her ear:

"My brave little sweetheart, you *are* here!"

"Oh!" cried Mary Ellen; and the man at her side frowned — the cry was not one of unalloyed joy. But the girl clung to his arm and made no protest as together they hurried down the street toward a waiting carriage. Mary Ellen's foot was on the carriage-step when a man came hastily forward and a sharp voice said, —

"Come, come, Lloyd, what do you mean by this?"

Mary Ellen caught her breath at the evil word which fell then from her lover's lips; she caught her breath again and shrank away at sight of his face beneath the street-lamp.

The stranger advanced and laid a hand on Mary Ellen's arm.

"Miss Knowlton," he said gravely, "you will let me take you home, I know."

"Confound you, man!" snarled Lloyd; but the other interrupted.

"See here, Lloyd, the game is up, and you know it. This is no blood-and-thunder romance and we won't draw our swords. For Miss Knowlton's sake I shall have nothing

to say about this affair — *provided* you go at once and leave her in peace. — Come," he finished peremptorily to Mary Ellen.

The girl, half relieved, wholly dazed, and ever accustomed to the voice of command, obeyed. Lloyd, with an unsmothered curse, jumped into the carriage, gave a sharp order, and was driven rapidly away. It was then that Mary Ellen burst into a storm of sobs. She trembled so violently that her companion led her to the low stone wall and advised her to stop for a moment and rest.

"There, there," he said after a time, almost impatiently, "Lloyd is n't worth a tear. If you knew him as I do, you would n't shed even one!"

"It — it is n't that," sobbed Mary Ellen; "it — it 's the rest of it!"

"The — rest of it," repeated the man dazedly. "And what, pray, is 'the rest of it'?"

The whole pitiful story came out then in one burst of words — all the pent-up longing, the repressed ambitions of years. As the man listened his face grew stern. Even when the

story was finished, and Mary Ellen had risen to her feet, he was still silent.

"How did you know about — to-night?" she faltered at last.

"I've been watching Lloyd for some days," he replied shortly. "I too am staying at The Maples. My suspicions were aroused by something I saw, and — knowing him as I do, and knowing you — I thought best to be on the lookout."

"Knowing me!" gasped Mary Ellen.

A whimsical twinkle came into the man's eyes, all in the dark.

"You don't remember me, I dare say," he observed dryly. "I am Jared Cunningham. This is the second time I have had the pleasure of escorting you home, Miss Knowlton."

"Oh — *oh* — OH!" cried Mary Ellen, and wished then indeed that the earth would open and swallow her up.

They were almost at the gate when Jared Cunningham spoke again. This time the words came swiftly, yet with a curious restraint.

"Miss Knowlton, I've been thinking of the

story you've just told me. I've been putting it with what I've known of you before, and with — to-night. I have just one thing to say. I had a squirrel once, — a caged squirrel, — and in my anxiety to be good to it I cracked all its nuts for some time. Had I continued longer to do this the results would have been disastrous — for the squirrel; a little more, and he couldn't have cracked them himself. If I may say it, Miss Knowlton, you've had all your nuts cracked for you all your life; but I don't think it's too late to mend matters if you'll only begin to crack some now for yourself. Think it over. Good-night. I'll wait until I see you're safe inside."

That Mary Ellen did "think it over," and to some purpose, was evident no later than the next morning at breakfast when Mrs. Knowlton passed the brown bread.

"Thank you, no; I prefer the white," said Mary Ellen.

Mrs. Knowlton's jaw dropped.

"Mary Ellen, as if I didn't know which bread you should eat!"

There was an electric silence. Mary Ellen

sat more erect in her chair, her color deepening. Finally she spoke, her words following one another in a blind rush lest her courage fail her.

"That's just it, mother. You've always told me which bread I should eat and which ribbon I should wear, and when I should go and when I should come home. It was all right when I was little, of course, but I'm big now, mother. It's time I ate bread of my own choosing and wore gowns of my own selecting. I—I've just got to begin to crack nuts for myself or else I—I can't ever crack them!"

"Why, Mary Ellen Knowlton!" gasped the woman across the table. "*Mary!*"

It was months later that Mrs. Knowlton said to a friend:

"Yes; I think myself that Mary Ellen has done very well. Jared Cunningham will make her a good husband, I'm sure. But, then," —and she bridled self-consciously,—"how could Mary Ellen do other than well with the careful bringing up she's had!"

To Let — An Apartment

ON Thirty-eighth Street, East, in the parlor of a stuffy, four-room suite, Miss Josephine Barton looked over the newspaper attentively, her eyes coming to a pause halfway down the column.

"'Apartments: new, up-to-date, all modern conveniences, moderate rent,'" she murmured. "'Expressly designed for people of refined tastes and limited means. References required.' I — I am going to look at them," she finished with sudden decision. "It sounds as if it would be just the place for auntie and me."

On Thirty-eighth Street, West, in a "second-floor-front" of a shabby, eminently respectable boarding-house, Major Hilton smoothed across his knees a copy of the same paper, and read the same advertisement.

"By George, I'll do it!" he exclaimed aloud. "And if they're what they pretend to

be, I'll send for the little mother and—begin to live!"

Ten days later, before the door of a small apartment house far uptown stood two furniture vans—a red, and a yellow one. From the red came tables and bureaus whose marble tops and carved mahogany legs hinted at past grandeur; from the yellow, came chairs and couches whose sumptuous springs and ample dimensions more than hinted at present comfort.

On the other hand, soft greens and dull browns in rugs, cushions, and hangings suggested a taste that was feminine and discriminating; on the other, bright blues and cherry reds suggested a taste that was beyond any doubt masculine and indiscriminating.

Above the sidewalk, in the twin bay windows of the second floor, Miss Josephine Barton and Major Hilton looked out upon a world in which nothing was familiar save their respective household goods being unloaded below.

"Hm-m—some one has taken that other

suite so soon," mused the lady; "now there are no more to let. Was n't I fortunate!"

"By George!" grumbled the major in the other window, eying his neighbor's goods. "S'pose those belong to the lucky dog who took that south suite — and only two hours ahead of me, too, according to the janitor. Well, if I can't have that I 'm mighty glad to get this," he added, as he turned away from the window.

Down on the sidewalk an oak costumer and a lady's standing workbasket stood side by side. A minute later they were flanked by two suitcases, twins in color, shape, and size. Two minutes later a man from the red van swung the costumer across his shoulder and caught up one of the suitcases. As had been his custom throughout the afternoon he directed his steps toward number three, the south suite.

Thus it happened that at six o'clock that night, after the men had gone, Miss Barton confronted, in the middle of her bedroom floor, an unfamiliar, unlovely thing of oak and prongs.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, dropping limply back into the nearest chair. "Why, that is n't mine!"

Across the hall, the major in his bay window, was cutting the cords around a paper-covered object that stood perhaps two feet tall before him.

"Why, what—I don't remember—this can't—well, by Jove!" he finished, as the wrappings fell away and disclosed a lady's workbasket, dainty in white enamel and gold. "Well, by Jove!"

In the south suite Miss Barton rose to her feet.

"It must belong in number four," she murmured, circling around the costumer as if looking for an advantageous point of view. "What an ugly thing!—still, I fancy it is convenient. I—I ought to take it home, I suppose," she added, looking furtively at the door.

"Humph!" ejaculated the major across the hall, his eyes on the basket. "Rather neat—that! Hm-m; looks homey, and as if buttons were sewed on. Belongs to that lucky

beggar in the south suite, I suppose. Seems to me he's got — well, when the little mother comes, I'll look homey, and my buttons will be sewed."

And he caught up the basket and started for the hall door. The next moment he came face to face with his own image in the mirror of the hat-rack.

"Great Scott!" he cried, dropping the basket. "Where's that suitcase? I can't go looking this way!"

"I'll just change my stock," decided Miss Barton in suite three, as she picked up a tan leather suitcase and snapped the spring.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Oh — oh-h!"

"By Jove!" exploded the major across the hall. "Well, by Jove!"

Before Miss Barton's horrified eyes lay a man's vest, two neckties, a nest of collars, and an immaculate, glistening shirt-front; before the major's, lay a fluff of lace and linen, a glimpse of pink and pale blue, and on top, as if hastily thrust there, a pair of black kid slippers.

"Oh!" shuddered Miss Barton, and closed

the bag with a snap. Not so the major. For a moment he gazed in blank stupefaction; then he slowly reached out his hand, picked up one of the slippers, laid it across his palm, and raised his hand to the level of his eyes.

"Hm-m; and that's neat, too," he said softly; then a whimsical twinkle came into his eyes. "Not even the little mother will bring—like that," he whispered.

The distant click of a door brought the major suddenly to himself, and sent a crimson flood to neck and brow. In a marvelously short time he had flung wide his door and was striding into the hall, a lady's workbasket and a tan suitcase clutched in his hands.

The major and Miss Barton met exactly in the middle of the narrow landing.

"I beg pardon—"

"Excuse me—"

"Er—one of the men—"

"Through a mistake—"

"Very careless—"

"Unpardonably stupid—"

"Thank you—"

"Thank you—"

"Trust you were not inconvenienced."

"Oh, not at all."

"Er — thank you."

"Er — thank you."

Then two doors shut crisply. Behind one the major wiped his brow. "By Jove! — by Jove!" he exclaimed faintly. Behind the other, Miss Barton sank palpitatingly into a chair.

"Oh, it was awful — awful!" she gasped. "Aunt Emma, he — he had mine!" Then she fell on her knees before the suitcase and fearfully pressed the spring. "Oh!" she cried, with pink cheeks, and shut the bag with a snap.

Getting settled was not a long matter in the south suite. Miss Barton and her aunt, Mrs. Todd, made quick work of it. Across the hall it was different. The "little mother" could not come for a week yet, and the major spent much of this time in shifting his new furniture about from corner to corner. There was something else, too, which interfered not a little with the writing of his "Results of the Spanish War," upon which he was supposed to be just now hard at work — the major

went shopping; he went shopping for a white enamel workbasket barred with gold.

As the major took all his meals out during those seven days, he passed very frequently up and down the stairway. Sometimes he met his neighbor of number three. The first time they encountered each other, both blushed a flaming red, though their eyes did not once meet. The second time, and on all subsequent occasions, the major looked bravely and hopefully into Miss Barton's face; but not once could he gain from her a glance, much less a bow of recognition.

It was on the sixth day that Miss Barton, on going out for a loaf of bread, found the major sitting on the top step of the stairway. He arose at once as she approached, but when she came back ten minutes later he was again sitting on the top step.

For ten minutes Miss Barton moved restlessly about her rooms, then she once more put on her hat and coat and went out into the hall.

As before, the major sprang to his feet

and retreated toward his own door, but Miss Barton did not seem to notice. In the little store around the corner she bought a paper of pins which she in no wise needed, and bent hurried steps homeward. At the top of the stairs she turned squarely around and faced the man skulking by the door of number four.

"Is there anything wrong? Are you in trouble? Can I do something for you?" she asked with a precipitation that hinted at a courage fast oozing out at her finger-tips.

The major came forward. His face was more painfully red than it had been even at their first meeting. The major could face cannon without flinching, but women! — especially a woman whom he could never see without a shameless remembrance of a certain dainty slipper laid across his palm.

"Thank you, no — er — that is, I have been careless enough to leave my keys inside. I am waiting for the janitor — and a ladder."

"Oh, but the janitor went to Brooklyn this forenoon. He told me he would n't be back until five o'clock," said Miss Barton, pityingly.

"The dickens he — I beg your pardon,"

stammered the major, taking out his watch. "Hm-m; three o'clock."

"I—I wish I could do something," murmured Miss Barton, backing toward her door.

"Thank you—thank you—it's not necessary at all—at all," assured the major. "I would go downtown, but my hat, too, is inside—you see I only went down to the letter-box, and forgot that I didn't have my keys. But I have a newspaper with me and I'm quite comfortable. Serves me right. It will teach me to be more careful next time." And he bowed Miss Barton into her apartment.

For ten minutes more Miss Barton moved restlessly about her pleasant rooms; then she knocked at her aunt's bedroom door.

"Aunt Emma, Aunt Emma!" she called. "You'll just have to come into the parlor. He, next door, is locked out, and I've just got to ask him in until he can get a ladder."

"What!" demanded Aunt Emma, sitting bolt upright on the bed, where she was trying to get a nap. "What!"

Some minutes later, Mrs. Todd, sleepy and unwilling, sat in the parlor's easiest chair

trying to knit; the major, flushed and ill at ease, sat in the bay window pretending to read; and Miss Barton, pink-cheeked and dignified, sat by her workbasket trying to look unconcerned.

For a time there was silence. The major, having been distinctly invited in to read, felt in duty bound to keep the paper raised before his face; but his eyes, more mutinous than his hands, left the paper and explored the territory nearest within their range.

There was the shaft of sunlight making the brown of Miss Barton's waving hair glint like gold. There was the soft flush on Miss Barton's cheek — the major suddenly discovered that his neighbor was decidedly pretty. His eyes, gaining courage, made a wider sweep. Everywhere they encountered soft lights, subdued tints, a restful blending of colors.

"There's something here — something that I haven't got," he mused; then his eyes fell on the workbasket. Down went the paper, and up went his chin determinedly.

"Miss Barton, could you — would you tell

me where you got that basket?" he asked abruptly.

The lady's neck, cheek, and brow burned scarlet—it was the basket that had been truant with the suitcase. Suddenly the major, too, turned fiercely red. The next instant something of the courage that was his in battle flashed from his eye.

"I asked," he went on with a laugh that surprised himself, so easy was it, "because I've hunted for a week for a basket like that to give to mother. I want a white-enamel, standing workbasket, barred with gold," he finished, unconsciously falling into the formula which he had that week presented to no less than ten New York clerks.

"But I didn't buy it," laughed Miss Barton in her turn; "—not that way. It was an ugly little cane basket of no particular shade when I bought it. I enameled it myself and checked it off with gold paint."

It was easier after that. The major lost his flush, and Miss Barton looked unconcerned without trying. Mrs. Todd, in her comfortable chair, dropped her knitting and lost her-

self in sleep. The major could talk, and talk well — and he made the most of his opportunity.

Miss Barton forgot time, herself, and even the suitcase; but when five o'clock had come and the major had gone she remembered nothing but the suitcase and the embarrassing moment when she and the man had faced each other in the hallway. She decided at once that she had been too cordial, too kind, too free with this unknown, unpresented man. She would be more careful in the future. She would see that she did not make that slip again.

The next time that Miss Barton met the major on the stairs she merely bowed and dropped her eyes, whereat the major so far forgot himself as to turn and stare. The major had looked for better treatment. The major's remembrance of that charming afternoon in the restful room, where lived the woman with sun-flecked hair and peach-bloom cheeks, was very vivid; while the major's recollection of the suitcase episode was growing fainter every day.

Weeks passed. The little mother came to number four bringing cheer and comfort, and a sense of home; but she had not been there two months before she was summoned to a distant state to see a sick daughter, whereupon the major resumed his old habit of going out for his meals. His neighbor he seldom saw; when he did see her there were only the grave bow and the quickly averted eyes to greet him. He began to wonder if that delightful afternoon in the homelike room at number three were only a dream after all.

Did the major forget on that day just a week after his mother left?—or was he shamelessly making a shrewd attempt to find out for a certainty whether that afternoon was a dream or not? At all events, one o'clock and Miss Barton found him seated on the topmost step of the stairway.

"I'm locked out again," he announced cheerfully, as he rose to his feet. "And, if you'll believe it, that inconsiderate janitor has gone to Brooklyn, too."

Miss Barton raised her head. For an instant a repetition of the old invitation trem-

bled on her lips; then a certain exultation in the man's voice, an eager expectancy in his eyes, sent a swift suspicion to her mind.

Perhaps — what if he had done this thing on purpose? What if —

"I am sorry," she said gravely, and passed to her own door.

"Well, by Jove! — by Jove!" muttered the major as the door shut her from view. Then he sat down on the topmost step and thought.

If the keys lying then on the major's chiffonier had been left there intentionally, their owner was most assuredly now reaping his reward.

It was on a pleasant morning not long afterwards that Mrs. Todd left the house to spend the day in shopping. At ten, dressed in cool gray and white, Miss Josephine Barton opened her door and stepped into the hall. She had scarcely crossed the threshold when a gust of wind from the rear blew the door to with a bang.

"My key!" gasped the lady, her small teeth

seeking her under lip. Then a relieved look came into her eyes. "Never mind—Aunt Emma will be here long before I get back from Tarrytown."

She took one step forward, then stopped. She pulled gently, then with force, at her gray draperies. With a quick indrawing of her breath she turned and looked behind her. Fully three inches of the hem of her skirt lay under the close-shut door.

"Oh!" she cried softly, and tugged again. "Oh, oh, what shall I do?"

At that moment came a click across the hall. Miss Barton turned right about face on the instant. She opened her purse and began carefully to scrutinize its contents.

The door across the hall opened and the major stepped out. There was an almost imperceptible pause while he waited for her recognition. It was then that Miss Barton made her first mistake. In her anxiety to appear natural and unconcerned she gave, not the usual cold bow and mute dropping of her eyes, but a dazzling smile.

"Good morning, major," she said brightly.

"We must all be improving this beautiful day, you see."

It was the man's visible start of surprise that opened Miss Barton's eyes. She froze instantly.

"Certainly, certainly," beamed the major; then he caught sight of her stern, unsmiling face. "Er—certainly," he mumbled, as he turned and hurried downstairs, wondering the while if it were his ears or his eyes that were playing him false this time.

When silence once more reigned in the hall Miss Barton dropped wearily to her knees, twisted her body about, and brought both hands to bear on the gray skirt. It was useless. The cloth was new and stout, and the hem lay for several inches out of sight behind the door.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" moaned Miss Barton. "What can I do? I can't stay here all day!"

A clatter of steps from the floor above brought her painfully to her feet; and again she scrutinized the contents of her purse. This time a tenant from number five passed

down the stairs. When he had gone she slipped to her knees and tugged once more at the skirt only to have a second clatter of feet bring her again upright. Four times was this repeated. At the end of an hour she was leaning, white and exhausted, against the casing when the main door downstairs banged shut. She had just time to open her purse and begin the counting of coins that to her seemed already worn thin by the process, when the major appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Why—" he began.

Miss Barton looked full in his face and bowed gravely. Then she dropped her eyes. The major stumbled to his own door and fitted in the key; but the door had not been five minutes closed before it opened again and admitted the major to the hall.

"Miss Barton, are you troubled in any way?" he demanded recklessly. "Is anything wrong? Can I help you?"

"'Troubled?' 'Wrong?'" stammered the lady. "Why, what makes you have such a funny idea?"

"Is everything all right?"

"Why, of —of course," insisted the lady, vainly trying to quiet her conscience at the same time by the assurance that everything was all right, and that it was n't a fib.

"Miss Barton, I—I am going to dispute you," began the major, desperately, perspiration starting to his forehead. "When everything is all right, people don't stand for an hour counting money in their pocket books." As he finished, the major unconsciously braced himself. He had, at that moment, a vivid recollection of how he felt when he first faced the enemy's guns.

Miss Barton, however, did not open the vials of her wrath upon his head; she did not even wither him with a glance. She only flushed and backed a little nearer her door.

"Why, really, how—how do you know I have been here an hour?" she demanded, determined at all costs to keep from this one man, at least, the knowledge of her predicament. (Miss Barton was not forgetting the second time that the major had left his keys.) "Perhaps I—I am just going out again," she

finished gayly, throwing the "perhaps" as a sop to her conscience, which was alert and very tender.

The major gave a sceptical wave of his hand.

"Miss Barton, is it—money?" he burst out. "Won't you let me—aid you? You—I—doubtless you have started out with not so much as you thought you had," he went on, trying to make volubility cover embarrassment. "I assure you, I—"

"It is not money," interrupted Miss Barton, icily; the next instant she bit her lip with vexation.

"Then there is something!" cried the major. "Miss Barton, you—you are locked out!" he declared with sudden inspiration.

There was no answer.

"You are!"

Still no reply.

"What a shame!" exclaimed the major sympathetically. "But, never mind—I'll have the janitor here in short order. I saw him down to the corner not five minutes ago."

And the major leaped down the stairs two

steps at a time. Ten minutes later, flushed and disturbed, he faced Miss Barton again.

"He's gone—the rascal!" panted the major. "Totally disappeared into thin air! But, Miss Barton, couldn't you—can't I—do something?"

Miss Barton shook her head; then she laid hold of her courage with both hands.

"I was going to Tarrytown," she explained. "I would go now, only—my dress is caught—in the door."

"My dear lady!—you poor thing!—I beg of you, allow me!" And the major was down on his knees at her side.

There was a long silence, unbroken save for the nervous tapping of a small shoe on the hard-wood floor. The major caught himself wondering if it were the same little slipper that he had once balanced on his hand. Then he blushed a deeper red and redoubled his efforts to pull the dress from beneath the door.

"I'm afraid I shall—tear it," he faltered at last.

"Never mind if you do," returned Miss Barton miserably.

"Oh, but—it would be a shame!—such a pretty dress!"

In spite of herself Miss Barton smiled. The pink in her cheeks deepened.

"If you have a knife you might—cut it," she suggested faintly.

"Never!" protested the major, springing to his feet. "It is a good three inches under the door. It would ruin it!"

Suddenly the man straightened himself and squared his shoulders—not for nothing had the major been placed in command of men.

"My dear lady," he began authoritatively, "there is only one thing to be done; but first I'm going to make you comfortable." And he disappeared into his own apartment.

When the major came back he had an ottoman, three cushions, and a book. A minute later, in spite of protests, Miss Barton found herself seated on the ottoman, the cushions at her back against the door, and the book in her hand.

"Now, where is Mrs. Todd?" demanded the major. "I'm going for her keys."

"You can't find her. She's shopping," announced Miss Barton, tragically.

"Then we'll stay here till she comes," retorted the major, dropping himself upon the topmost stair with a long sigh that certainly was not one of discontent.

Fortunately the hall was light, the building being only three stories high and having a big skylight in the roof. Also, fortunately but two families lived on the floor above; and as members of both had already passed Miss Barton on their way out, there were few curious eyes to be amazed at the remarkable *tête-à-tête* on the middle landing.

It was at noon that the major and Miss Barton feasted gayly on chicken sandwiches, hot coffee, cake, and ice-cream brought in by the major from a neighboring restaurant and spread on his mother's sewing-table. It was then, too, that a shaft from the noon sun fell through the skylight and turned to gold the fluff of hair just above Miss Barton's forehead.

The major saw, and drew a long breath. At last he had before him in the flesh the

woman with the sun-flecked hair and peach-bloom cheeks.

One, two, three hours passed. The prisoner and her attendant talked, read aloud, and told stories. At four o'clock Mrs. Todd, coming quietly upstairs, found the two deep in a game of chess.

"For heaven's sake!" ejaculated Mrs. Todd, clutching at the balusters with both hands—she had nearly fallen backwards.

When explanations had been given, the door opened, and the gray dress released, and when Mrs. Todd had disappeared into her own room, Miss Barton turned a flushed face to the major.

"Thank you," she said. "You—you have been very kind."

Again the major straightened himself, and again his mouth set into stern, determined lines.

"Miss Barton, I'm a fighter; I'm not a diplomat. I know no way except to come straight to the point. Once before I passed a pleasant afternoon with you—a very pleasant afternoon; but from then until today I have

been sternly held at the end of a grave bow. Today I discovered that Lieutenant Meers is our common friend. Miss Barton, with your kind permission, Lieutenant Meers will shortly bring me to call. I would like to be introduced to you."

Miss Barton blushed, then dimpled, then smiled.

"I shall be delighted to see Lieutenant Meers and — his friend," she said, "but — is Lieutenant Meers quite — necessary?"

It must have been a year later that the New York papers again carried the advertisement:

APARTMENT: new, up-to-date, all modern conveniences, moderate rent. Expressly designed for people of refined tastes and limited means. References required.

"Hm-m," mused Major Hilton's wife. "It sounds just as it did before — only there is n't but one this time."

"There certainly is n't, my dear," retorted the major; then, saucily, —

"You see, Josephine, I always did want this south suite!"

Her Wedding Journey

THERE was never a time that honeymoon trips had not possessed a wonderful fascination for her. As a child, she had eagerly devoured every available bit of information concerning the wedding journeys of the entire village, and in time it became a settled thing for each returning bride to subject herself to the admiring questions and worshipful homage of little Matilda Jones.

When it was that the idea of her own wedding trip first came to her, she could not tell, but it grew with her growth and strengthened with her strength, until it became the best part of her life. The supposedly necessary adjuncts of a man and a marriage never occurred to her — her vision of a wedding journey contained herself alone.

To be sure, as she grew older, a village youth would now and then shamble diffidently up the garden walk on Sunday afternoon, or

shyly offer his escort home from evening service at the little church. But all these things only frightened her, and by and by the young men ceased from troubling.

Then one day her mother died, and she was left all alone in the little white cottage at the end of the lane. As time passed, the thin little face wore a look of placid contentment, and the faded blue eyes looked out serenely—Matilda was about to take her wedding journey.

Away in the top of the tiny house, far back in a bureau drawer, lay a little pile of money. She could tell the history of almost every penny there.

This was the dollar her pickled pears had brought, and that was the quarter saved on the trimming for her black alpaca dress. All this little pile of nickels and dimes she had earned selling blackberries, and that beautiful shining gold piece had been sent to her on her eighteenth birthday by her uncle. This particularly dingy five-cent piece she had gained when a mere slip of a girl, pulling weeds in the garden. It was the first money

she had ever earned, and she had immediately dedicated it to her wedding journey.

She made daily pilgrimages to the shrine at the top of the house, and lovingly fingered her accumulated treasures. She thought — she was almost sure — she had enough now. There were nearly twenty whole dollars! She caught her breath at the audacity of spending such a fortune, but, after all, this was her very own — it did not rob her scanty income in the least; it had been saved for years for this very purpose.

When people took wedding trips they wore new things. She looked doubtfully at her black alpaca; brushed it — sponged it — pressed it — and regarded it with a dubious sigh. It would have to do — she certainly could not afford a new dress. But in some trepidation she did invest in white cotton cloth and embroidered edging, and her cheeks grew pink with the excitement of making the unwonted finery.

Her evenings were especially delightful. She would go into the parlor and bring out the big atlas, and reverently turn the pages until

she came to the map of her own state. There, her slim forefinger would find the black dot which stood for the little village, and her eyes would gloat over the unknown world before her.

Just above that dot — where all those black lines met — was the junction, and sometimes she held her breath as she carried her finger away out along one of those lines, and stopped with a little gasp of delight at the extreme end of the map. Then she would draw a long sigh and shake her head, and, giving a quick hitch to her chair, would settle herself to the delightful task of marking out her wedding journey.

She would go to the junction by stage. Then she would follow one of those black lines until she came to that large round ring with a dot in the middle.

Such a bit of a way it looked to be on the map, but she knew it was forty miles from home, and a big city!

Her breath came fast and she trembled a little when she thought of a hotel. Yes — she should go to one! She had never been to a

hotel — a real hotel — she thought, regarding the village inn with fine scorn. She was not quite sure she would know how to behave — but she should certainly go. Whoever heard of a wedding trip without a hotel!

She decided to stay three days, perhaps four, and she looked fondly at the little round ring on the map, which contained so many delightful possibilities.

Then she would close the book and go to bed, only to dream of wonderful electric-car rides to the moon.

At last the great day came. It dawned clear and cloudless, and a very happy Matilda climbed the stairs for her treasure. Joyously she grasped the precious pile with eager hands, then looked ruefully at the empty spot in the drawer. She hesitated a moment, quickly found the dingy nickel, and smiled content as she placed it back in its old corner and closed the drawer.

With trembling hands she arrayed herself in her wedding garments and seated herself on the doorstep to wait for the stage.

"Matilda Jones looks almost handsome this

morning, with her cheeks so pink," said a pretty girl on the back seat to her companion, as the coach stopped for its passenger.

"Why, Nellie," said Matilda to this same pretty girl, as she clambered in, "am I going to have you to ride with? That will be nice, I'm sure!"

"Yes, I am going up to the junction to do some shopping—you know I'm pretty busy these days," said she, with an adorable blush, which suddenly reminded Matilda that it was nearing Nellie's wedding day. This warmed her heart to her at once, for was she not on her own wedding trip? She beamed anew on Nellie as she settled herself comfortably for the two-mile drive.

How the sun shone and the birds sang, and how good the air was to breathe!

"Are you going away for long, Miss Matilda?" inquired Nellie politely.

"No—only a little trip," she replied, trying to look unconcerned, as if trips were an every-day occurrence with her; but the red deepened in her cheeks, and her voice trembled a little as she asked abruptly:

"WE CAN'T TAKE ANY AT ALL, MISS MATILDA"

"Where are you going to take your wedding trip, dear?"

The girl colored painfully.

"We can't take any at all, Miss Matilda — is n't it dreadful?" and the young face looked pinched and drawn with woe. "You see, Jim's money, that he 'd been saving up to go with, got all burned up in the fire, and — and — we 've had to give it up!" she finished with a wail that clearly told her disappointment.

Miss Matilda sat very still. She thought her heart had stopped beating — then it gave a big thump, and there was a strange, tight feeling in her throat. She did not say anything, and by and by Nellie looked out of the window with a grieved expression on her pretty face. When they reached the junction, the young girl turned her head, and said constrainedly, as she jumped lightly from the coach: "I hope you 'll have a nice time, Miss Matilda."

"Thank you," she murmured without smiling, and clambered slowly down. Then she walked along the platform, and sat down on an old settee on the shady side of the building.

By and by a train rumbled in — shook itself of passengers — gathered a new lot — and rumbled out again. One — two — three trains did the same thing, and the forlorn little woman still sat on the old settee.

"Didn't you want to take one o' them trains?" good-naturedly asked the blue-coated man, who had been curiously watching her for some time.

She looked at him with dull eyes, and shook her head.

When the stage coach made its evening trip to the village Nellie was surprised to find Miss Matilda on the back seat.

"Why, I didn't expect to see you so soon! Didn't you go?" asked the young girl pleasantly.

"No, I had — I had a headache — I mean a throat-ache," stammered Matilda in confusion.

The next night Nellie burst into her mother's room with an excited face, holding an open letter and a pasteboard box in her hand.

"Mother — what do you think! I told

Miss Matilda yesterday how we could n't take any wedding trip, and she never said a word, and then I felt real cross, 'cause I thought she did n't care a bit; but just see what that dear old maid has done!"

MY DEAR NELLIE: I think wedding trips are the nicest things in the world, and I don't want you to give up yours. I had a little extra money that I did not know what to do with, so I send it to you for your wedding trip. I hope you will have a nice time. Your friend,

MATILDA JONES.

And Nellie's tears dropped fast on the dimes and nickels that rolled out of the pasteboard box.

Away at the top of a tiny house, in a bureau drawer, a lone nickel keeps guard over a dainty pile of wedding garments.

The Subjugation of Joan

UNTIL his fortieth birthday, Abijah Wilson had regarded women with an indifference that leaned toward neither interest nor aversion — then he saw Joan.

Abijah Wilson's courtship of Joan Kent was very much of the *veni, vidi, vici* character, and was conducted with a vigor and dispatch that hinted at a possible concentration of twenty-odd years of love-making and women-wooing into six short months. At all events, from the introduction in December to the wedding in June, the affair gave Blairsville much to talk about. The very fact that the most confirmed bachelor in town had fallen so speedy a victim to the somewhat modest charms of a chance visitor to the place was sufficient in itself to cause comment, to say nothing of the absorbing details of the wooing.

To Abijah it seemed that the last week in May would never pass.

"There's seven days, sixteen hours, and forty-five minutes more," he enumerated one night as he sat alone on his front porch, "an' then she'll be here. Gosh! it don't seem true, after bein' alone so all these years." He sat silent for a minute, puffing at his pipe; then he drew a long breath.

"She'll set there, an' me here. We won't take no weddin' trip. It'll be trip enough jest ter be tergether here ter home. Seven days, sixteen hours, an'—an' forty-*three* minutes now," he finished, consulting his big silver watch and gloating over the two minutes gone.

Abijah talked to himself a good deal during those following seven days. He had fallen into the habit soon after his mother died, ten years before, and as time passed and he was so much alone, he grew more and more to express his thoughts aloud. Just now he was laying great plans. There was nothing from cellar to garret in the tiny house that was too insignificant to be considered in the light of "what Joan will say." To tell the truth—though Abijah did not know it—there was

never any doubt in Abijah's mind as to Joan's opinion.

"She'll want this chair here, and that one there," the man would say — and place the chairs exactly as they had been placed for the last twenty years.

"She'll want this curtain 'bout here," he would murmur, as he carefully adjusted the shade to the exact angle it had known since the day it was hung.

Even the strange new things which told of a feminine presence, and which had already come to the house, did not puzzle him as to their best disposition.

"She'll want the sewing-chair here, and the workbasket there," he declared after a moment's thought, setting the chair in a corner, and fitting the standing wicker-basket into a niche by the window just large enough to hold it. He smiled happily as he gazed at his completed arrangements, nor did it occur to him even then that the sewing-chair and workbasket are not usually separated by the length of the room.

For ten years Abijah had lived alone, with

the semiweekly visit of old Nancy to do his washing, sweeping, and baking. For ten years Abijah's home and habits had felt no ruling hand but his. To Abijah the world was a chessboard, and his belongings were chessmen to move as he willed; in taking unto himself a wife he was merely adding a pawn to his game.

Ten miles from Blairsville Joan Kent was preparing for her marriage.

Joan was forceful, bright-eyed, and thirty-five. Among Joan's friends Joan was a personage, and to them, as well as to Joan herself, this marriage meant much.

The Ladies' Aid Society wondered — half fearfully, half pleasedly — what they would do. Joan had managed every fair and bean supper for the last dozen years. The Woman's Club openly bewailed — but covertly rejoiced. Joan had been their president ever since the club started. The three nieces whom she had brought up from childhood — they were all over twenty now, and in excellent positions — told every one what a "kind mother" they

were losing — and asked themselves how it would seem when they could change their gowns without permission and wear rubbers at their own discretion.

To Joan Kent life was a court where she occupied the throne. In marrying she was merely moving the court to Blairsville.

On Monday, June 1, the marriage took place; but far more than the seven days, sixteen hours, and forty-five minutes of Abijah's calculations passed before the two sat on the cool front porch at Blairsville — Mr. and Mrs. Wilson had gone at once on a wedding trip.

"We 'll go ter New York an' see the sights, an' we 'll stay a week," Joan had declared; and Abijah, after opening his lips twice irresolutely, had said nothing. A curious helplessness had come to him with his wife's words. He pinched himself to make sure he was awake. Then he went obediently and bought two tickets for New York, wondering all the time why he did not turn his feet about and say decidedly, "Oh, no; we 'll go home. Come, Joan."

Abijah pinched himself many times during that honeymoon trip. Always he found himself awake; and yet—he went to see plays when he preferred vaudeville, he rode when he wanted to walk, he stayed at a big hotel when he liked little ones better, and he ordered turkey at restaurants when he craved beans and fish balls.

On Monday of the next week at five o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Wilson returned home. At sight of the familiar porch and door Abijah squared his shoulders and raised his head.

"Oh, Joan, it does look good; don't it?" he breathed ecstatically.

"H'm-m," murmured his wife, her eyes bent disapprovingly on the mat by the door. "That rug ain't no good, 'Bijah. I don't like that kind neither. We'll have ter have a new one right away, dear."

Abijah's jaw dropped.

"Why, Joan, that—that's always been there!" he gasped.

"So I should say," smiled his wife grimly. "An' it's time it wa'n't there no more."

Three evenings later Abijah Wilson sat in

a corner of the porch, huddled into a disconsolate heap — Abijah had lost his home.

Inside the house, under a hanging-lamp (which had not been filled and lighted in ten years before), sat a woman reading; Joan did not approve of "settin' outdoors nights." Near her were the workbasket and the sewing-chair — together; she had joined their forces before she had been in the house twenty-four hours.

In Abijah's eyes, as he sat alone in the dark, was a vision of what the house had come to in just three days.

Scarcely one chair was in its place, scarcely one shade at its accustomed height. Five pictures had been rehung and four rag-carpet rugs changed about. The sacred parlor had been thrown wide open to the devastating sun and air, and the still more sacred hair wreath had been banished to the attic.

At the thought of it all Abijah almost wept, while not twenty feet away under a swinging lamp a woman hummed a tune as she rocked.

As the days passed it grew worse. For Joan Kent there had been the three nieces,

the Ladies' Aid, and the Woman's Club: for Joan Wilson there was only Abijah. It was Abijah now whose bean suppers were given or omitted as Joan saw fit, and it was Abijah, also, who was told when to don rubbers and raincoat.

And yet—

Never had Abijah's socks and buttons been so well looked after, and never had Abijah's stomach been so daintily and painstakingly served.

"'T ain't as if she wa'n't so good an' lovin'," moaned the man to himself, hugging his knees and looking up at the stars with troubled eyes as he sat in his favorite chair on the porch. "'T ain't easy ter say anythin' when she 's so good-natured about it all. She jest takes her way as a matter of course, an'— an' goes ahead an' does it!"

"Come, 'Bijah," interrupted a voice from the doorway. "It 's time ter shut up the house."

"Oh, but, Joan, I—"

"An' there 's a parcel on the table, dear," continued Mrs. Wilson imperturbably, as she

turned away. "I'm leavin' it for you ter bring up. There's somethin' in it that I want, so hurry, please, an' bring it up right away."

"Yes, yes, Joan, but I want—" from the stairway there floated back to him the snatch of a merry song.

"By Johnny-ginger-joe-jinks!" ejaculated Abijah—and Abijah had to be very angry indeed (or very happy) to say that.

For three days Abijah went about the house plunged in deep thought. There must be some way out of this tyranny—it only remained for him to find it.

On the fourth day he began to try experiments. Immediately after dinner he took out his pipe, lighted it, and sat down in the sitting-room. He had not long to wait.

"Why, Abijah Bowles Wilson!" cried his wife. "I said you could n't smoke in here, an' you know it!"

Abijah shook in his boots, but he cleared his throat and essayed a smile.

"I know, d-dear," he stammered; "but I —I always have smoked here, an' I don't see why I should n't now."

"But it scents up!"

"Oh, that 'll get out in no time."

"An' I don't want you to!"

Abijah's throat grew dry, but he kept bravely on.

"I know," he acknowledged, "but you see, Joan, I *do* want to, an'—"

"But I asked you not to!" Joan's chin was quivering.

"I know; but it 'pears ter me—"

"An' it's such a little thing!" almost sobbed Joan, interrupting. "Such a little, little thing, an' we was so happy before, an' I don't ask anythin', not anythin' of you; an' now this—this—" then the floods came.

And Abijah?

Abijah petted and soothed his grieved wife, and called himself a beast and a brute; then he took his pipe to the porch—and Joan smiled.

Out on the porch Abijah smoked and pondered. Clearly argument had failed. He would try coaxing.

Twenty-four hours later he had to admit that coaxing, too, was vain; his wife had only

laughed, patted his cheek, and called him a poor, misguided dear who did not know what was good for him.

He sulked the next day, but that was worse. She did not seem even to notice him at all. It was then that he laid hold of his courage with both hands and tried the last and most fearsome of his plans.

"See here, Joan," he stormed, upon the first provocation she gave him, "I've stood this thing jest as long as I'm a-goin' to. I can't eat, sleep, nor move when, where, nor how I want to. There ain't nothin' that I want ter do but what you step on it an' tell me ter do it diff'rent. I've bossed myself fur a good many years now, an' I ain't a-goin' ter stand no petticoat bossin' at this late day!"

And Joan?

Joan was speechless with rage and amazement. For one long minute she gazed straight into her husband's eyes; then she stalked upstairs and began to pack her trunk.

Two hours later a remorseful, abject Abijah and a tearful, graciously forgiving Joan sat under the hanging-lamp together.

For a week thereafter Abijah submitted to the inevitable with what grace he could summon to his aid; then his eyes fell on these words in the paper he was reading, as he sat on the porch:

> Knowing well that women will go without anything if once their right to have it is conceded.

Abijah frowned. He cocked his head to the left and read the words again — more slowly, more carefully. "Knowing well that women will go without anything if once their right to — have — it — is — conceded." He dropped the paper and gently stroked his chin. Chilling memories came to him of those vain experiments of other days, yet ever before his eyes danced the tantalizing possibilities of the words he had just read.

"I'll risk it!" he cried at last aloud, as he squared his shoulders and looked the world in the face. "It said she'd go without anythin' — *anythin'* if you'd only tell her she'd got a right ter have it; an' I'm blest if I don't tell her that her way's the best goin', an' that she oughter have it always!"

"There, 'Bijah," interrupted his wife's voice, "if you ain't out here talkin' ter yerself as usual. I might 'a' known where I'd find ye. An', say, 'Bijah, do ye know, I was thinkin' only terday that this porch oughter come down; it shades that parlor winder too much."

Abijah's heart missed a beat; then it pounded against his ribs in great throbs that seemed to take all his strength. To think that this should be the test — this porch that had been his dear treasure from the day his two-year-old feet had trundled a tin wagon across it for the first time. Dared he risk it now — and on *this?* For one moment more he faltered, then he drew a long breath.

"An' so it shall come down, my dear, if you say so," he began a little feverishly. "I'm sure there hain't no one got a better right ter say how 't will be than you have. I ain't sayin' but I shall miss it, though," he added, with a little break in his voice. "I ain't sayin' but I shall miss it. A man can't set in one place fur nigh on ter forty year an' then not know when it's gone. But it shall

be jest as you want, Joan, jest as you want. You know best, an' you 'd oughter have your way about it, anyhow," he finished, moistening his dry lips with his tongue.

For a moment there was silence. The woman hesitated, and looked slightly puzzled. The man held his breath.

Then Joan spoke.

"Well, I don't know, 'Bijah," she said slowly; "mebbe it don't shade the winder so very much, after all, an' of course you *have* set here a good while. We won't hurry about it, anyhow. Let's let it rest fur a spell," she added, as she turned back into the house.

"By Johnny-ginger-joe-jinks!" breathed Abijah out on the porch.

It was some weeks afterward that a caller said to Joan:

"Well, I don't see, Mis' Wilson, as things have changed much here; they look about as they did a dozen years ago."

Mrs. Abijah Wilson smiled and bridled.

"No, they ain't changed much," she said.

The Tie that Binds

"Ye see, Mr. Wilson says I can do anythin' —anythin' I please with everythin' in the house, an' I did make some changes 'long at the first; but I've put most of 'em back. Somehow, I like 'em pretty well as they be."

A Matter of Loyalty

MRS. WILLOUGHBY was on her feet by the door, giving the last stroke to her somewhat worn black gloves.

"Yes, I must go, girls. If I stay longer I shall keep Mr. Willoughby waiting, and he's so careful not to hinder me that I'm sure he ought to have some reward."

"But you'll take the doll-table, Nettie, surely," said Mrs. Atwood anxiously, who, being president of the Monday Club, felt responsible for the whole fair.

"Oh, yes, I'll take that, Ruth. And put Mr. Willoughby down for five dollars, please. He'd like to give more, but — well, you know, there are so many good causes that need help."

"And Mr. Willoughby's always so generous!" exclaimed the treasurer.

For a brief instant Nettie Willoughby's rather plain face seemed actually glorified; then it settled into a conventional smile.

"Oh, no," she objected, "not that. He'd like to be, though, if he only had the means. Good-bye." And the door shut behind her.

Over by the window a dark-eyed girl stirred restlessly. She was not a member of the Monday Club, being merely on a visit to Mrs. Conrad, the club's hostess, for the day. She rose now from her seat and came nearer the group by the table.

"Who is this Mr. Willoughby?" she demanded, with a laugh.

"He's Mrs. Willoughby's husband," retorted two or three voices.

"Well, I should put it the other way," scoffed Miss Harding. "I should say she was Mr. Willoughby's wife. Really, ladies, never in all my life have I come across such a paragon as is this man."

"And you know that so soon, Kate?" laughed Mrs. Conrad.

"My dear cousin," replied Miss Harding, "do you realize that for one whole hour I have been sitting next Mrs. Willoughby?"

There was a general laugh, and then Mrs. Atwood spoke in defense of her friend.

"You are right, Miss Harding. One can't be very long with Mrs. Willoughby without hearing of her husband. We are used to Nettie and her ways, however; we don't notice it so much, I suppose. Then, too, she's such a dear."

"But who is he?" persisted Miss Harding.

"Why, he's a—" Mrs. Atwood hesitated, and Mrs. Conrad picked up the dropped thread.

"Why, yes, he's a—what *did* Nettie say he was?"

"Why, I don't know—insurance or investments or something," interposed another; then triumphantly: "He travels, you know."

"Oh, yes," chorused several in relief, "he travels."

"But what does he look like?" Miss Harding asked. "What does he look like?" she demanded again.

There was a blank silence.

"Well, to tell the truth, *I* never saw him," acknowledged Mrs. Atwood, at last.

Kate Harding looked from one to another;

then she left her seat and dropped on to a low stool.

"This is interesting," she declared. "My dear ladies, am I to understand that not one of you has ever beheld this paragon in the flesh? You?—nor you?—nor you? No, not one. Then I am to remain forever in ignorance of what he looks like unless I ask his wife."

"Don't, dear," interposed her cousin, laughing in spite of herself. "It sounds almost as if we were making fun, and, really, Mr. Willoughby is a most estimable man. His name is always down on subscription lists, and he never fails to give toward festivals and parades, and all that sort of thing. He's so public-spirited, even if he isn't here much himself—he gives his money."

"Yes, and he doesn't drink, chew, smoke, or swear," added Mrs. Atwood, "and his sense of honor's so great and his sense of humor so keen that—there!" she broke off contritely. "I beg everybody's pardon—Nettie's most of all. I didn't mean to be unkind, but"—she turned to Miss Harding—

"you have seen Mrs. Willoughby, and you know how it is. And, really, it is rather funny that we know the intimate personality of this man, from his opinion on the tariff to the way he handles his fork, yet we've never set eyes on him."

"You see, my dear," she went on, "it's this way. There is a story. Every one knows it, so I'm committing no breach of confidence in telling it.

"Most of us here were all girls together with Nettie, for her family is an old Boston one. But there were five years, from the time she was about eighteen, that we didn't see much of her — school, travel, and all that, you know.

"Then came the bombshell — Nettie had married while abroad, and would live there for a time. Of course, we sent letters and felicitations and presents. Nettie replied with girlish enthusiasm, like any other bride, and had much to say of Mr. Willoughby.

"Well, to make a long story short, about a year ago the Willoughbys came to Boston. We called, of course — all of us. We found

them in an inexpensive little apartment up in Roxbury — evidently Mr. Willoughby was not rich, at all events. But Nettie was the same dear girl, and she welcomed us with open arms, fitting into her old place at once.

"From the very first she quoted Mr. Willoughby. There was never any mystery about him, and he was always just right, no matter whether it were a question of ethics or a remedy for the toothache that was under discussion.

"But we never saw him. Our husband's calls were returned with Mr. Willoughby's cards and Mrs. Willoughby's apologies that Mr. Willoughby was here so little! It has been that way ever since. It seems incredible that we haven't seen him, knowing Nettie so well, and, of course, in a small town it would have been impossible. But in a place like Boston —" Mrs. Atwood shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course, if one chooses to remain invisible," murmured Miss Harding.

"But does he choose?" interposed her cousin. "Nothing that Nettie says would lead

us to think that he did. And as for her trying to keep him in the background — of course, that is absurd, when you remember how she quotes him from one day's end to another."

Mrs. Atwood thought of the invisible Mr. Willoughby at five o'clock the next afternoon when she toiled wearily up the two flights of stairs that led to the Willoughbys' Roxbury apartment. She even echoed her thoughts aloud.

"Well, I should like to see him," she muttered under her breath; then Mrs. Willoughby opened the door.

"You dear thing — and it's such a climb!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Willoughby was saying only this morning that we just ought to get a place with an elevator. It's so hard for our guests to climb all these stairs. Come in, dear."

There was much to be talked of. This fair was proving troublesome, and Mrs. Willoughby's head was considered one of the steadiest, and her lead one of the best to follow.

It was nearly six o'clock, therefore, when Mrs. Atwood rose to say good-bye. At the top of the stairs she paused.

"You promise to come to-morrow at four, then," she said. "And now I'll have to hurry —I'm late as it is." She took one step, and gave a sharp cry; then she leaned heavily against the banisters.

"Ruth!" cried Mrs. Willoughby in quick alarm.

"My ankle—it's weak, you know—the one I turned last summer. I'm afraid I've turned it again."

"You poor dear! Here, take my arm. There, just one step more. Oh, I am so sorry!" And Mrs. Willoughby helped her friend across the hall and into the big arm-chair nearest the door. "There; now what shall I do? Arnica? Hot water? Which is better?"

"Nothing, dear, thank you. I must get home some way. I'll send for the carriage. Let's see; you haven't a telephone, have you? If Mr. Willoughby were here, now, perhaps he'd take a message."

"Yes, and he'd know just what to do, too. He's such a good—" Mrs. Willoughby stopped abruptly. She had glanced at the clock, and a look curiously like terror had come into her eyes. In a moment she went on, but there was a new note in her voice, a note that brought a puzzled frown to her friend's forehead; "—good nurse, you know, when anything ails one. And he is coming later. But there's a telephone just next door, and I'll take the message."

Once alone, Mrs. Atwood sank back in her chair and closed her eyes. It was strange how much pain a little—there was a step on the stair; then came the sound of a key unskillfully applied to the lock. Mrs. Atwood opened her eyes. The next instant the door banged wide and a short, red-faced man entered the room.

"Confound that key!" he snarled. Then he broke off with a muttered oath, his eyes on the woman in the big chair.

Mrs. Atwood pulled herself forward in her seat. Just how much right this ill-looking, ill-mannered creature had to an explanation

she did not know, but her own position certainly demanded a few words.

"Mrs. Willoughby is at the neighbor's," she began coldly. "I have hurt my foot, and she is telephoning for my carriage. She will be in very soon."

"Oh, so my wife is out?" retorted the man, as he shut the door none too gently.

Mrs. Atwood's fingers contracted. Her whole body stiffened. Her eyes refused to turn from that blotched, blear-eyed face with its unkempt beard. It was incredible, preposterous. This could not be Nettie's husband.

The man walked somewhat unsteadily across the room and dropped into a seat. He tipped his chair back and fingered his watch-chain.

"One of Nettie's friends, I take it?" he said, with a telltale thickness in his voice. "I don't think I have the honor of your acquaintance."

With a mighty effort Mrs. Atwood pulled herself together.

"I am Mrs. Atwood," she heard her own voice say, as if a long way off. "I came to

see Mrs. Willoughby about our fair, and I turned my ankle just as I was going."

"A fair, is it? I thought Nettie was up to some tomfoolery or other. She takes care I don't hear much about 'em nowadays — she knows my opinion of 'em too well. She used to come begging for a dollar here and five dollars there, but she's quit that. I reckon she found it didn't do much good!" He laughed boisterously, then added: "I told her charity began to home."

There was another step outside. This time the click of the key in the lock betokened a sure hand, and the door swung open at once.

"The carriage'll be here right away, dear. How is the poor—" Mrs. Willoughby stopped short, her eyes widening as the scene grew upon her with all its horrid meaning. In that one minute she seemed, to the watching woman in the big chair, to age ten years.

"This gentleman came in," she began faintly. "He—"

"Yes, I came in and found my wife out," interrupted Willoughby. "I found her out

in more ways than one, too," he added jocosely. "Your friend, here, has been giving it all away, Nettie. Thought your poor old husband would n't find out things, did n't ye? Maybe you want a quarter for this fair, eh?" And he leered at her half playfully, half angrily.

For a moment no one stirred or spoke; then Mrs. Willoughby put her hand to her throat.

"Then you — you two don't need an introduction," she said with a visible effort. "How is your ankle now, Mrs. Atwood? Can I do something for you?"

Mrs. Atwood shook her head.

"Thank you, no," she stammered.

It was thirty minutes before the carriage came, but to at least two of that group in the Willoughby apartment it seemed thirty hours. Mrs. Atwood said little, and her friend said less — but her friend's husband said enough. His range of subjects proved to be wide and varied. With sickening accuracy he managed to hit upon, and leave in ruins, almost every lauded characteristic of the widely heralded Mr. Willoughby, and in the midst of the

desolation sat his wife and his wife's best friend.

When the carriage came, Mrs. Atwood, with the aid of John, Charles, and Mrs. Willoughby, was helped safely downstairs and into the back seat. The men were on the box, and the carriage had almost started, when Mrs. Willoughby opened the door and sprang to a place at her friend's side.

"I'm going to ride part way," she said breathlessly. "I — I want to speak to you."

"Yes, dear," murmured the other, and reached out a hand warm with sympathy.

It was quite dark. Fitful gleams from the street-lights flashed through the carriage windows and threw into occasional sharp relief the two women sitting hand in hand. Nettie Willoughby did not once look at her companion, and it was some minutes before she began to speak. When she did, her words came brokenly and with long pauses.

"At the first they were true — those things I said — at least, I thought they were. He seemed everything he should be. Then I found out he drank, and I — I said them all

the more. It seemed to me that if I said them enough it would be so. And — and after that I — just said them.

"It grew worse and worse, and we came here. I could n't bear to be pitied, and have you all know. Besides, there was always the hope — he — might — change. It was n't as though I were trying to hide him. I was n't. He would n't go anywhere I wanted him to, and he did n't like company. He is never so that — that he gets into any — trouble, and he is away most of the time.

"I — I just built those stories around the man I thought that he was, and wished that he was; and somehow, I seemed to be living with *him* rather than with this one. The very fact that he was what he was, made me all the more anxious that you and the rest should think he was good and noble. That 's why I said so much, I suppose. I did n't realize that I was lying. It seemed like the 'make-believe' I used to love to play years ago when I was a child.

"As for the subscriptions, I earned the money sewing and in other ways. It made

me so happy to see his name on them. He didn't — I — of course, it — it's the end now, and — "

The carriage stopped, and Mr. Atwood came hurrying down the steps to greet his wife. In the confusion that followed Mrs. Willoughby slipped away. When Mrs. Atwood turned to look for her she was gone.

It was at four o'clock the next afternoon that the Monday Club met at Mrs. Atwood's. The hostess, her lame ankle placed on a cushion, received in state.

There was just one member of the club absent when the clock struck four. Mrs. Willoughby had delayed until the last moment. It was because of her pledged word, and because this first appearance in public must be gone through with some time, that she had come at all.

She was standing now just outside the half-open library door, summoning her courage to go in, when Miss Harding spoke.

"And I'm just dying to hear about it, Mrs. Atwood. They say you sprained it there, and

had to stay until nearly seven o'clock, so of course you saw Mr. Willoughby?"

Out in the hall a woman swayed and almost fell. She tried to speak, to push open the door, but speech had fled.

"Well?" prompted Miss Harding. "Did you see him?"

There was an instant's pause before Mrs. Atwood said lightly:

"See him? To be sure I did, and he certainly is not an ordinary man, such as most of us know. In fact, I think that in some ways Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby are the most remarkable couple of my acquaintance—and you know my opinion of dear Nettie."

"And here is Nettie herself," chorused several, as the door swung open. "You should have come sooner, my dear," added Mrs. Conrad, "and heard Ruth sing the praises of the most remarkable couple in the world."

Only one woman of them all read aright the look of adoring gratitude that came to Nettie Willoughby's face.

Jack

BOTH man and dog were motionless. In the man, blue-veined lids lay low over sunken eyes until the lashes made semicircles of black on the wasted cheeks; in the dog, two round spots of luminous devotion looked out from beneath silky black forelocks, and gazed with unswerving intensity into the face of the man lying back on the hay.

There was another long minute of troubled waiting, then a quiver shook the body of the small black dog, and a low whine broke the silence of the hayloft. At the sound the blue-veined lids fluttered a little, and a thin hand lifted itself from the hay and fell heavily on the small black head.

"It's a shame, old fellow — so it is," murmured the man. "In just a minute we'll go — in just a minute, old boy. You see, I wanted to rest — rest." The voice trailed off into silence.

There was a long pause, then the dog whined again. This time the man opened his eyes.

"And did you think I didn't know it?" he asked, trying to pat the dog's head, but barely succeeding in stirring his own finger-tips. "Of course I know you want your breakfast, old boy; and we'll have it—have it right away. If only it weren't for this weight, this dragging weight at my heels, Jack, and this —giddiness, I'd go now. Things are wrong with my head, somehow, but we're almost there—we must be. Yesterday we passed the brook where we used to fish—she and I. You remember, Jack—I showed you the deep black hole by the big rock. Oh, we're there, there—almost there!"

In his eagerness the man raised himself on his elbow. The dog, in quick response, quivered from head to tail, and told his joy in broken whines and one staccato bark. He even turned and gave a sidewise jump toward the stairway by which they had climbed to the loft the night before; but the man, breathing heavily, fell back into his old position and closed his eyes.

For a minute the dog did not stir; then the tense muscles relaxed, the tail drooped, and the eyes lost their look of joyous anticipation. Very slowly the little creature crept back to the man's side and resumed his wistful, silent scrutiny of his master's face.

It was not long before steps sounded on the barn floor below. The steps ascended the stairs, and a head, red-haired and red-bearded, showed itself above the loft floor.

"By jingo," drawled a voice, "I did hear a dog bark!"

The head was followed by a long, loosely built body, and the body by two big-booted feet which clamped across the floor and came to a pause about four paces distant from the man and the dog on the hay.

"Well, what you doing here?" drawled the voice again, but this time with a note of impatience.

There was no reply except a tentative move toward acquaintance and a conciliatory whine on the part of the dog.

The red-haired man frowned at the dog and took a step nearer.

"Come, come — drunk, be you?" he asked sharply, peering into the upturned face on the hay.

The dog, reading with unerring nicety the frown and the sharp tone, backed toward his master with a series of short barks.

"Yes, yes, Jack, I know," murmured the man on the hay, faintly, without opening his eyes. "We 'll go — we 'll go, right away. I 'm almost — rest — ed."

"Humph!" ejaculated the red-haired man, shambling across the floor and down the stairs.

Five minutes later he reappeared followed by a second edition of himself — scarcely less tall, but less bearded, less marked with the passage of years.

"Drunk, I suppose," the son was saying.

"Not a bit of it," retorted the father. "I tell you he 's sick, and I ain't going to run no chances. Who knows but it 's catching? It 's mighty lucky I heard the dog before I drove out of the yard. I 'm going right by Slocum's, and I can leave him there as well as not. There ain't no place for sick men what nobody

knows unless 't is the poorhouse. Anyhow, I can't keep him!"

Jack's master was unconscious when the two men lifted him and carried him down the stairway; and Jack himself was an animated bunch of distressed uncertainty whether to regard these strange red-headed men as friends or enemies. That his master made no sound or motion or resistance evidently argued well in Jack's mind, for his barks and whines smacked more of excitement than of anger; but when the two men laid their burden on a pile of sacks in the bottom of the empty wagon, Jack flew to the side of his master in a frenzy of fear lest in some way he should become separated from him.

"Confound the little beast!" snarled the old man. "Here, I can't have him along. Take him off! Can't you?"

"Not much I will!" grinned the son, rubbing his hands against his trousers as though he already felt the impact of those strong little teeth.

"Humph! I guess we can fetch him through his stomach," retorted the other,

shuffling into the house to appear, a minute later, with a chicken drumstick. "Come, sir, come—good fellow!" he coaxed, throwing the bone to the ground.

For one short instant Jack's great hunger made him forget all but that tempting morsel before him. With a bound he reached the edge of the wagon; then he paused, turned, and crept back to his master with a low whine and the touch of his tongue on the limp hand.

"Humph!" growled the old man again, picking up an empty sack and handing it to his son. "Catch the little devil off his guard and hold him tight," he commanded, reaching for the drumstick and thrusting it almost under the dog's nose. "Now!" he shouted, as the hungry little animal pounced upon the bone.

The next moment, Jack, blinded and well-nigh smothered in the folds of the sack, was struggling in the young man's arms.

"Shut him up in the woodshed and don't let him out until night," called a sharp voice as the wagon rattled out of the yard, "then set him adrift."

It was six o'clock that night when the young man opened the woodshed door and attempted to set Jack "adrift." At first there was nothing but a frantic barking and whining, and a frenzied rushing over every inch of the yard, the barn, and particularly of the hayloft, all with a quivering, sensitive nose held low to catch a possible clew; but as time passed and it looked as if "adrift" would mean nothing but this, the young man tried to drive the dog from the dooryard.

To leave the place where he had last seen his master, Jack stoutly refused, however; and not until the young man supplanted his persuasions with a pile of small stones and set the dust to flying about Jack's feet did the dog put his tail between his legs and run, yelping with fright, up the road.

The sun dropped behind the hills in the west, and the shadows deepened. The long steep road began to lead straight up, up, up, and the weary little black legs moved more and more slowly, stopping at last altogether. The wistful eyes swept the road behind and the road before, then scanned the pastures on the

right and the woods on the left. A long echoing howl, followed by another and another, broke the silence of the twilight hush, and set small feet to scurrying among the underbrush. Then slowly, with hanging head and drooping tail, hungry, homeless, and miserable, Jack began to climb once more the long hill.

At dark he reached a square white house with green blinds, flanked by a generous barn and a group of well-kept outhouses. Creeping into an open shed he established himself in a corner under a wagon, and dropped his nose on his forepaws with a long-drawn breath of weariness that considered neither right nor expediency, but demanded rest.

A dozen hours later, when Miss Emily Burbank opened her kitchen door to let in the fresh morning air she faced a small black dog sitting motionless on the broad steps.

"Oh!" gasped the lady, faintly.

In lieu of a knocker the dog thumped his tail on the wooden step. His speaking eyes grew luminous with expectancy; then he whined softly.

The sound seemed to stiffen every muscle

in the woman's body. She took one step forward and shook her apron with both hands.

"Shoo!—scat!" she cried. It was a cat or a chicken that usually called forth the condemnatory waving of Miss Burbank's apron.

"Bow—wow! Bow!" retorted Jack, quiveringly alert on the instant, as he swept the yard with eager eyes. That he himself was the object of attack never entered his head; when Jack heard "scat" he always looked for the cat.

"Ugh!" shuddered Miss Burbank, retreating into the kitchen and slamming the door. "The horrid little beast—I believe he was going to bite!" Then she tiptoed to the window and looked out.

All the throbbing life and energy had fled from the little body and left it limp with grieved dismay. The dog stood motionless, his wistful eyes fixed on the closed door.

"Go away," said Miss Burbank, sternly, from the window.

Jack whined and took one leap toward the unseen speaker.

"Go away, I say," repeated Miss Burbank. "I don't want you. Go home!"

"Bow!—bow-wow!" protested Jack.

"Go home!" insisted Miss Burbank, and this time she stamped her foot.

Very slowly the dog turned and dejectedly walked down the slope toward the road. At the edge of the yard he paused and turned toward the house. A moment later he lay on the grass, his nose on his forepaws and his eyes fixed on the kitchen door.

"The idea!" muttered Miss Burbank, as she crossed the floor and went out into the woodshed for kindlings. "Just as if—!"

"Got a dorg, I see," said a whimsical voice from the back-shed stairs.

"Indeed I haven't," retorted Miss Burbank sharply; and Tom Masterson chuckled as he continued his climb to the floor above.

Tom Masterson ran the farm "on shares," and lived in the upper part of the square white house with green blinds. Mr. and Mrs. Masterson had been there ever since old Silas Burbank died, leaving his twenty-year-old daughter Emily alone in the world. Emily was

thirty-one now — healthy, self-reliant, and known to pride herself openly on being free from "nonsense." "Nonsense" to Emily Burbank meant tears, heart-stirrings, and the allowing of sentiment to tip the scales of justice by so much as a hair's breadth. Stray tramps, cats, and dogs were never fed at her door, though the men in her employ and the stock in her barn received full measure of food and care. Vagrancy, and carelessness in looking out for one's pets — if one were so silly as to have pets — she could not countenance to the extent of distributing soups and scraps at her kitchen door.

The children of her acquaintance greeted her appearance with a frightened silence, but the sick hailed her cool hand and good judgment with a joyousness that found no fault and asked no questions. Those who had known her as a young girl years before gloried in their stories of "Emily Burbank's lover," and vied with each other in giving the most detailed account of how she had dismissed poor Frank Wingate, son of a dissolute but well-born and wealthy father —

dismissed him just because he had *once* broken the pledge and drank a wee little glass of wine; "and him with all his inherited tendencies to fight, too," some would add, resentfully. However varied the stories were in the telling there was always the one ending — that young Wingate had gone West and had never been heard from, and that now Emily Burbank was getting her just deserts by being nothing but a "lonely old maid."

Tom Masterson was well aware of Miss Burbank's disposition toward stray animals in general and dogs in particular, and from the barn he had been an amused spectator of the little scene enacted at the kitchen door that morning; hence his teasing question as Miss Burbank bent over the kindling-wood pile. He was still chuckling when he reached the top step of the woodshed stairs and lifted the latch of his back door. Downstairs Miss Burbank heard the chuckle and understood.

"Just as if — !" she said again, as she hurried into the kitchen and thrust the wood, with unnecessary violence, into the stove. "My dog, indeed!"

After breakfast Miss Burbank carried a six-quart pan of corn-meal mush and scraps into the poultry-yard. Not until she had entered the enclosure did she realize that her visitor of the morning had trotted noiselessly after her so that now he stood close by, expectant and eager-eyed. If nothing else had told her of his presence, the squawking and scattering of the hens and chickens would speedily have done so.

"Ugh!" screamed Miss Burbank, springing quickly to one side. "Go home, sir."

Jack whined, and came upright on his haunches: with his master, begging had been wonderfully persuasive.

"Go home — go home — go home!" reiterated Miss Burbank, flourishing her iron spoon and stamping her foot.

"Bow!" barked the dog, crisply. Where begging had failed with his master, "speaking" had been all-powerful.

Miss Burbank jumped nervously and followed the hens in their retreat.

"Go home!" she commanded, with all the sternness she could muster.

Down on all fours dropped the dog at once. Head hanging and tail between his legs, he slunk through the gate, and paused just outside the wire netting. With a spring Miss Burbank reached the gate and snapped it to; then she turned and began to throw spoonfuls of food among the hens and chickens.

Suddenly she became aware that the dog had shifted his position so that now he was at the right of the long narrow yard, and not ten feet away from her busy spoon. He was on his haunches, too, and Miss Burbank could not help seeing that his longing eyes followed every flying morsel of meat or bread. She tried to turn her head, to see nothing but the peeping, clucking flock at her feet; but her eyes refused to be diverted from that upright patient figure on the other side of the netting, and her hand began to make wild throws with the spoon.

Even to herself Miss Burbank would not own that she intentionally turned her wrist so that the small boiled potato flew over the fence at her right; but whether by design or by accident it made little difference to the

"WHY, HE CAUGHT IT!"

hungry eyes that saw the potato coming, or to the red and white cavern that promptly opened and swallowed it up.

"Why, he *caught* it!" exclaimed Miss Burbank, her fascinated eyes never leaving the dog's figure — still upright, and now confidently awaiting favors to come.

Whatever it was that sent the boiled potato over the fence, it certainly was not an accident that sent the choice bit of beef on the same route.

Again the dog deftly caught the food, and again Miss Burbank's eyes grew wide with interest. The big iron spoon was turning the contents of the pan topsy-turvy in search of another piece of meat when a baritone voice from the barn caroled forth in "When Johnny comes marching home." With a hasty movement and a guilty flush Miss Burbank tossed the remaining food to the chickens with one shake of the pan, and hurried through the gate. Try as she would not to notice, she was unpleasantly conscious that her every move was watched by a pair of grieved, wistful eyes. The low whine of disappointment was

still ringing in her ears when Tom Masterson accosted her from the barn doorway.

"Sort of friendly, ain't he?—that dorg."

"He's very tiresome," retorted Miss Burbank. "*Why* people can't keep their own dogs at home, I don't understand," she added, as she hurried toward the house.

A breakfast consisting of a boiled potato and a square inch of beef does not go far toward satisfying an appetite that has been thirty-six hours in accumulating; but it evidently was sufficient to convince Jack that more would follow if he did but have patience. Patience, in Jack's mind, apparently consisted of long, motionless watchings on the kitchen steps, varied by occasional short barks, pleading whines, and perhaps a gentle scratch or two on the door.

Three times Miss Burbank said "go home" from the window, and each time Jack disconsolately retreated to the edge of the grass by the road. That the dog obeyed her even to that extent brought a curiously pleasant sense of power to Miss Burbank. She remembered, too, that he had left the poultry-yard at her

bidding; and his feat of catching his food while erect on his haunches was very vivid in her recollection. On the whole, the small black dog was scarcely out of the lady's thoughts all day. The third time Miss Burbank said "go home" from the window, there was almost a smile on her lips in anticipation of another proof of her power over this curious little creature on her doorstep. The smile must have shown itself in her voice, for the dog hesitated as though not sure of her meaning, and she had to repeat her command before he finally obeyed.

By night Miss Burbank was strangely restless. To feed this dog was contrary to all her principles and habits; and even could she have set these aside there were still Tom Masterson's laughing eyes and meaning smile in the way; that Tom Masterson should see the downfall of her vaunted scorn for tramps of all kinds, and for dogs in particular, was torture to her. It was very resolutely, therefore, that Miss Burbank forced her eyes to take one indifferent look at the dog on the kitchen doorstep before she shut the window, locked

the doors, and prepared herself for bed. Hence Jack was still dinnerless and supperless when, after a despairing glance at the silent, darkened house, he crept into the shed and under the wagon for his night's rest. Fortunately, thirst was not added to hunger in Jack's case, for there was plenty of water at the barn within his reach.

Miss Burbank could not sleep that night. Even the counting of whole flocks of sheep, the reciting of the alphabet backwards, and the fixing of her thoughts on an imaginary yellow spot in the pit of her stomach, failed to close her eyes for any length of time. She tossed from side to side, and finally rose and went to the window. It was bright moonlight and the workaday world was turned to a fairy-land of loveliness. For a time Miss Burbank watched a fleecy cloud play hide-and-seek with the moon; then a step on the gravelly road in front of the house made her instantly aware that a rough-looking man had come around the bend in the road. She caught her breath with a low cry when the man paused and looked toward the barn.

Perhaps he was a tramp with an eye toward a good lodging-place; perhaps he was an artist with an eye only for the picturesque beauty of the buildings in the moonlight; whatever had caused him to pause on his way, appearances were emphatically against him in the estimation of Jack, who had been quick to detect the steps and their cessation. With a growl and a series of barks the dog sprang into the open and faced the man.

Whether the stranger's interest were practical or æsthetical, it waned at the first bark. Pulling his hat over his eyes, the man hurried down the road and out of sight.

"Oh, you — dear!" cried Miss Burbank, softly, her eyes on the dog. Then she drew in her breath and threw a quick look toward the ceiling — Tom Masterson slept in the room above. For an instant Miss Burbank hesitated, then she slipped into a wrapper and a pair of felt shoes, and went swiftly, but softly, into the pantry.

Two minutes later, at least one small dog in the world had the surprise of his life. Out of that cruel kitchen door, before which he had

spent hours of fruitless waiting, there came a soft-treading figure carrying a well-laden plate.

"Here, catch it!" commanded Miss Burbank in a hoarse whisper, pausing on the steps.

Jack heard, and bounded forward with a joyful bark.

"Sh-h!" cautioned the lady, with another guilty upward look, and a shrinking back toward the kitchen door. "Now — catch it," she finished, raising her hand with a piece of meat held lightly in her fingers.

Up on his haunches went Jack, and snap went his hungry little jaws. Once, twice, again and again, until the plate was empty and until Miss Burbank's eyes were shining like stars. Then the kitchen door softly closed, and the dog trotted back to his shed and dropped under the wagon with a deep sigh of content.

In the week that followed it did not take Jack long to learn that while the days were a repetition of that first one — with nothing to eat, and nothing to hear but the periodical "go

home, sir, go home," — he had only to appear at the kitchen door after the house was dark and silent, to be met again by that soft-treading figure carrying a plate heaped with good things.

It was on the seventh night, and after the seventh banquet, that his love for his new mistress broke bounds, and sent him to her feet in an ecstasy of frantic leaps, short barks, and efforts to reach and lick her hands. The onslaught was unexpected, and — to Miss Burbank — terrifying, though she soon saw that love and gratitude were behind it, and not a desire to crush and devour her.

"Down, sir, down!" she cried faintly, and backed into the house; but after that night the dog always had, as a dessert to his supper, a surreptitious pat on the head, and a low-spoken "nice doggy — good fellow" in his ears — albeit ever given with that furtive glance toward the upper floor.

If Tom Masterson knew of those nocturnal banquets, or if he wondered why the dog stayed day after day, he made no sign. He treated the whole affair with cheerful indiffer-

ence. He made no attempt to second Miss Burbank's daily commands to "go home, sir," nor did he ask the dog to stay by feeding him — Tom Masterson had been too long at the Burbank farmhouse to begin now to feed stray dogs.

The weeks slipped into a month, and still Jack stayed. He did not always see his mistress at night now, but the plate of food never failed to be waiting outside the kitchen door as soon as the darkness made it invisible to casual eyes. The "go home" sounded less and less frequently; some days Miss Burbank even forgot altogether to say it. People grew used to seeing a small black dog showing himself very much contented on the premises. Yet Miss Burbank, when questioned, invariably elevated her chin and retorted: "Indeed, no; it is not my dog. It is a stray one, and I wish whoever owns it would look after his property!"

It was on the Wednesday of Jack's fifth week at the farm that Miss Burbank came home from the Clayton's by crossing the field behind the Burbank barn. Miss Burbank had

forgotten all about the bull which Masterson had shut up only that morning in the field, nor did she remember until she saw the animal, maddened by the red parasol she carried, charging directly toward her.

It was not far then to the barnyard gate, and Miss Burbank did her best; but the desired goal seemed — to her crazed eyes — to recede as she ran. The animal was almost upon her, when a barking streak of black shot past her and pounced upon the low-bent head behind her.

That one instant's grace was Miss Burbank's salvation. She reached the fence and almost tumbled to the other side. Then at her feet there fell a crushed, palpitating thing of dirt-stained silky hair and agony-filled eyes; the bull had shaken himself free from his momentary burden.

"Oh! Oh-h!" shuddered Miss Burbank, her eyes moist, and a lump coming into her throat. For an instant she hesitated, then she stooped and gathered the dog gently in her arms. Halfway across the yard she met Tom Masterson.

"The bull tossed him — he's hurt," she explained brokenly, in response to the gaping wonderment in his face.

"Jiminy! Here, I'll get my gun in no time," he cried, starting to run toward the house.

"Your gun!" gasped Miss Burbank in a tone that brought Masterson's feet to an abrupt stop.

"Sure — to put the little beast out of misery. Why not? Even a tramp dog ought not to suffer."

Miss Burbank drew herself erect. Unconsciously her arms tightened their clasp. For an instant her eyes blazed into the man's; then she spoke.

"A gun! — a gun! Tom Masterson, you go straight down to Seth Harlow's and tell him I want him to come up here at once. Tell him *my* dog has got hurt. Do you understand? — *my* dog! Now hurry, please." And without so much as a backward glance Miss Burbank strode across the yard and through the kitchen doorway.

"By jiminy!" muttered the man, with a low

whistle; then he turned and ran down the road.

In the house Miss Burbank was removing with gentle hands the collar around the dog's neck. The engraving on the name-plate caught her eye, and she carried it to the window to read.

"'JACK. Property of Frank A. Wingate,'" she breathed, and grew suddenly white. The next moment she was down on her knees at the dog's feet, sobbing and murmuring broken words; nor were the sobs lessened when a moist, feeble tongue touched her cheek, and a troubled whine sounded close to her ear.

During the days that immediately followed Jack knew what it meant to lie in a padded basket and be tended from morning till night. Just how Frank Wingate's dog could have come to her, Emily Burbank could not in the least understand; that he was there was sufficient. Where the master himself was, puzzled the woman even more. It seemed to her that he must be dead; in no other way could she account for the weeks Jack had spent with her, and for his condition when he came. The

mystery of the thing seemed to Miss Burbank almost to touch the supernatural, and as the days passed she could scarcely bear to have the dog out of her sight.

Jack's wounds were not quite healed when a tall, bronze-bearded man rang the bell at Miss Burbank's door.

"Good morning," said the man, with a curious touch of restraint in his voice. "I called about a stray dog that I understand is here."

Miss Burbank stiffened. Only the night before Tom Masterson had been telling her that some of the traveling-men at the hotel in the village had said they were coming to see the dog that didn't know the difference between a bull and a toy spaniel.

"There is no stray dog here, sir," she said, icily. "I own the dog."

"And you would n't sell it?" asked the man, still with that touch of restraint.

"Certainly not."

"There is nothing that would tempt you?"

"Nothing."

"But — I know a man who — who wants it."

Miss Burbank shook her head.

"I can't help it. The dog is mine. He has been here for weeks, and I would not consider a separation under any circumstances."

"Upon my soul!" laughed the man, the restraint gone from his voice. (Miss Burbank started.) "You—" The man did not finish his sentence, for a series of frantic barks and whines interrupted. Mechanically Miss Burbank turned to open the sitting-room door. The next moment she almost fell over backwards, so overwhelming was the rush of a small black body with two bandage ends dragging at its heels.

"Frank!" she gasped an instant later, as Jack leaped into the man's arms and licked his face and hands in ecstatic joy.

"Yes, it is 'Frank,' Emily," said the man softly, as he crossed the hall to her side. "I've been sick. I was sick when I left 'Frisco weeks ago; but I wanted to get to you, Emily. I thought I was going to die, and we started for the East — Jack and I; I wanted to see you — once more. When I reached the junction I suspect my head went back on me; anyhow,

I started to walk here. I dropped somewhere by the way and was taken to the poorhouse. Slocum is new here, you know, and he didn't recognize even my name on the papers in my pocket; but he gave me good care — just as good as he did afterwards when I came to myself and he found out who I was. But I didn't die, Emily, after all, and — I'm here. Emily," — the man's breath came hurriedly — "did you mean that, a minute ago? Did you? You *said* that you wouldn't consider a separation from Jack under any circumstances, and — I have Jack," he finished meaningly, reaching out for her hand.

"Oh!" cried Emily, flushing a bright pink and drawing hurriedly back. "Of course you can have him! He isn't mine any more. I — you —" She turned and fled through the sitting-room door.

The man stood motionless, his eyes growing dark with misery; presently a voice, low, and not very clear, came from the sitting-room.

"Frank, if you'll bring — *my* dog in here, I'll put him in his basket."

A puzzled questioning swept across the man's face; then the light of a sudden comprehension set his eyes to dancing.

"Emily — sweetheart!" he cried, and strode through the door.

A Woman You Know

WHEN the Kelseys were first married they lived on a farm two miles from their nearest neighbors. The haircloth chairs and rag carpet in the front room looked very grand to Sarah Kelsey then.

It was not until two years later — when Jared was given a chance in his uncle's Boston wholesale house — that she realized there are such things in the world as red-plush upholstery and Nottingham lace curtains. Simultaneously with the knowledge came an overwhelming desire for possession.

Jared's salary was not large. It barely covered the rent of the cheap little flat in Roxbury and the necessary food and clothing for himself, wife, and baby girl. Yet that Sarah should wish for something — and wish in vain — was torture to him.

"But how can we get them, sweetheart?"

he demanded anxiously. "We haven't got the money!"

"Pooh! We don't need to have the money," she retorted. "Mrs. Morton didn't have it, either, an' she's got 'em. Installment, you know — just a little bit a week."

"But isn't that — debt?" His voice was woeful, and his eyes were fixed with vague antagonism on a fluttering bit of white at the Morton windows across the street.

"Debt!" she scorned. "Now, Jared, *don't* be silly! Of course it isn't debt — exactly. It's all the store asks — so much a week. You wouldn't give them any more than they ask, would you?"

Before the month was out the red-plush furniture and the Nottingham lace curtains were installed in the parlor of the Roxbury flat. Jared's noon luncheons grew more scanty and his cheeks less ruddy after that; moreover, his old suit was still worn to the store instead of the new one he had promised himself.

For a year Sarah reveled in her new possessions; but they were scarcely paid for before

she realized that red plush and Nottingham did not, after all, represent the acme of one's desires — there were yet chairs of satin and gold-leaf and curtains of Irish point beyond. Incidentally she also discovered that the street four blocks nearer the park was much pleasanter to live in.

"But, Sarah, the rent is higher — lots higher," remonstrated Jared feebly; "and you say we've got to get lots of new furnishings, too, if we go."

"Now, *dearie,*" coaxed his wife, "don't you see? Aren't they giving you more pay at the store? You earn more than you did."

"Why, yes — a little; but —"

"There isn't any 'but' to it, my love. You earn more — you can live better; that follows without saying. The extra you get will more than cover the increase of rent; 't will leave enough to get a few new things besides. 'T is n't much that I want; only a chair or two and some new curtains — these old things are only fit for the bedrooms. Really, I don't ask so *very* much — I should think you'd be willing to do a *little* for me!"

The Kelseys moved the first of May. It was a very pretty apartment into which they went. Jared thought so — what little he saw of it. His hours at home were shorter now, as he had fallen into the way of taking upon himself extra work for the evenings and for early mornings. The additional money which this brought was very convenient, inasmuch as the expenses of the new home had increased most unexpectedly. One considerable item was a maid to assist his wife in the housework. All Mrs. Kelsey's new neighbors employed maids, so really this was quite necessary — Sarah said.

Mrs. Kelsey enjoyed her present surroundings very much. There was a handsome church on the corner which she promptly began to attend. To be sure, she went alone — her husband pleading weariness as an excuse to stay at home; and, after all, Sarah deemed it quite as well that he should take charge of two-year-old Dorothy; the maid did not like children very well.

Sometimes Jared hinted that a long day in the country would rest him as nothing else,

but Sarah always frowned at this. She was distinctly shocked and said that she could not countenance such laxity in any member of her household — the Sabbath day must be kept holy. She was grieved that he did not find it in his heart to attend church; but as for gadding about the country — !

Sarah's religion increased and developed very rapidly after this, if her church life was any indication. There was a wonderfully delightful circle of ladies in the church, and as Sarah joined the Home Missionary Society, the Foreign Missionary Society, the Ladies' Aid, and the Helping Hand Association, she soon made many acquaintances; and as she graciously accepted all opportunities for service in the way of committees, suppers, sociables, and fairs, her new friends received her with particularly wide-open arms.

The minister, the deacons, their wives and their daughters called and called again. For a time Sarah was no little annoyed that her husband was never present on these occasions; but as the months passed and she began to scrutinize him more closely she came to dread,

rather than to wish for, his coming when she had callers.

Not that she need to have feared — there was little chance of Jared Kelsey's meeting his wife's friends. His breakfasts — save on Sunday — were served by the maid in a chill, lonely dining-room long before his wife was awake. His luncheons were eaten downtown, as were his dinners, since he had taken up evening work. He was usually late home, and if by chance he heard voices in the parlor he fled like a hunted creature to his room — or rather to Dorothy's. He always kissed Dorothy before he slept.

Sunday only was the danger point, and Sunday his wife was gone nearly all day — to church twice, to Sunday-school, and often to vespers or to mission meeting. There was little chance, indeed, of Jared's meeting his wife's friends. Yet Sarah was not quite pleased with what she saw.

"My dear," she began at breakfast one Sunday morning, "do you know you are actually looking shabby?"

Her husband started, and flushed a little.

"Am I?" he asked. "Well — you don't see much of me," he finished nervously.

Mrs. Kelsey frowned.

"But I ought to — I'm your wife. Surely your wife is entitled to *some* of your society!"

"But I'm — busy."

"'Busy'! Jared, what kind of reasoning is that? That's no excuse for frayed linen and a shiny coat. I — I'm actually ashamed of you when folks see you, Jared — I am!"

The man across the table winced.

"But, Sarah, I — we —" He paused helplessly. "Folks don't see me," he finished, with sudden bitterness.

"But they might," she insisted, "and just think how I'd feel! Now *won't* you get a new suit?"

A sharp retort rose to his tongue. His lips parted, then closed with a snap. Very gradually a softer light came into his eyes.

"Sarah, dear," he began huskily, "perhaps you don't think what you're asking. You know I — we — I have to be economical. This suit is all right for the present. I — I have other uses for my money."

Mrs. Kelsey's chin quivered, and her eyes overflowed.

"You — you're always preaching economy," she wailed, "just as if I was extravagant, when I don't have anything — not anything! And I do want such a lot of things that I've never hinted at — not a word! And now I get blamed, *blamed,* just because you will wear old clothes. And here's Dorothy growing up and she'll be seeing things and noticing things right away, and she'll be ashamed of us — ashamed of her father and ashamed of her mother. Oh, Jared, Jared, I never, never thought you'd be so cruel — so awful cruel!"

The man sprang to his feet and paced up and down the room. Sarah crying — and because of him? That was the one thing he could not endure. From the time away back in their schooldays, when she had cried for his sponge and his slate-pencil, Sarah's tears had been all-potent. What a brute he was, to be sure!

"Sarah, Sarah, don't!" he begged. "I didn't mean — I didn't say — there, there, child, nobody blames you. Don't cry — there,

there!" Her head was in his arms and he was patting and smoothing the yellow hair.

"And—and I'm not extravagant?" she faltered.

"No, no!"

"And—you don't blame me?"

"No, no, dear; of course not."

"I—I should n't think I ought to be scolded just because I—I wanted you to—to look good," she sobbed.

"Why, certainly not," soothed the man, and cursed himself for a brute.

"I—I've got to have some new clothes, and—and Dorothy has, too. We're just in rags—both of us! But I'm not going to ask for them; you'll say I'm extravagant—you—you will!"

Jared's face paled and his lips twitched. Had it come to this? Was he indeed so cross and unreasonable that his wife dreaded to ask him for needful clothing?

"Of course you shan't ask me, dear," he began huskily. "You shall have them without asking. I—I'll have some money Saturday. Could you wait somehow till then, dear?"

His wife smiled through her tears and wiped her eyes on a bit of lace-edged muslin.

"There, now, it's all fixed and we won't cry any more," said Jared, with an attempt at playfulness. "And I'll tell you something, too, dear — something good! I think I'm going to have a raise before long — it looks like it. Won't it be fine if I do?"

"Oh, Jared, really?" cried Sarah, springing to her feet. "Then maybe we can go down to the beach this summer for just a teeny bit of a time. Dorothy does so need it, dear; she's actually looking pale and thin. I shall be so glad to get her out of the city this summer!"

In May the raise came, and in June they left for Winthrop Beach — that is, Sarah and her young daughter did. At first it had been planned that Jared should go, too, coming into town each morning for his work; but when Sarah began to look for boarding-places she could find nothing to suit her for the sum they had decided to pay, so she was obliged to take more expensive rooms. It was then that Jared concluded it would be too hard for him to run back and forth each day; be-

sides, if he went, his evening work would have to be given up. Then, too, his breakfast and dinner would cost so much more than those he could pick up at a cheap little restaurant in town that it really was not worth while.

They were most fortunate in being able to let their Roxbury apartment, all furnished, for three months; consequently Sarah stayed at the beach all summer. Jared rented a hall bedroom on Bulfinch Street, which was within walking distance of his wholesale house; so even his carfare did not have to be reckoned now. It was only ten cents a day, to be sure, but it helped just so much on a luncheon — frequently even buying the whole of it. Jared was ashamed, sometimes, because he valued a nickel or a dime so highly. He felt cheap and mean, but — there were so many ways for his money!

His room on Bulfinch Street was small and rather stuffy, but after all it did not matter much — he was in it so little. There were the Common and the Public Garden for Sunday — when it did not rain.

It was during this summer that there were

some important changes in the firm for which he worked. One of the partners died, and in the general shifting around which resulted therefrom Jared was given a very responsible position with a correspondingly large increase in salary.

Jared's uncle was a stern but eminently just man. He kept a sharp eye on his nephew and had been more than pleased at his industry, faithfulness, and trustworthiness. He was glad of the opportunity to give this special mark of commendation to one so deserving, and he congratulated Jared on the fact that it had come so early in his career.

Jared was dazed at his good fortune. It seemed almost unreal to him. For some reason — not quite clear to himself — he did not tell his wife at once. He would wait until she came home; it was already the middle of July, and he would see her in less than two months.

It was also during this summer that Jared first met Mr. Hollingsworth. John Hollingsworth had a little money and a great deal of

unscrupulousness — there were those who hinted that the latter possession was speedily augmenting the former. Jared knew him as an agreeable, wonderfully friendly man who had a particularly wide knowledge of financial affairs. Indeed, the most of his conversation seemed to be on stocks, bonds, and "the market." On Sundays Jared walked quite frequently with him in the Public Garden, and Hollingsworth always had a new story to tell of some friend who had made a "good thing" under his guidance.

Jared was fascinated. It seemed so easy a way to make money. He asked questions, all of which Hollingsworth obligingly answered, even going to some length to explain the mysterious process of "trading in stocks."

"I'll tell you what," Hollingsworth finally said one day in a burst of good nature, "I'll let you in on my next deal. You shall see for yourself how it is — just a little matter of a hundred dollars, you know. You'll double your money in no time!"

Jared was overwhelmed at the man's generosity. It was indeed kind of him, and yet —

He had the money — oh, yes; his increase of salary had given him an unusual surplus in the bank, and it was pay day again soon. Yet, if he should lose — but he would not lose; and it was so good a chance — it was a pity, indeed, to let it slip!

Jared went in on the next deal, and in a wonderfully short time afterward received a check that represented a fabulously big interest on his investment. Jared was intoxicated with excitement and delight, and Hollingsworth very kindly consented to take an additional hundred of the young man's money for investment. Then Jared went down to Winthrop — it was the last Sunday in August — and gave his wife his budget of good news.

"Now we won't have to pinch so, dearie," he finished. "We'll take a little breathing spell, and I'll get acquainted with my family all over again."

"Oh, Jared — you old darling!" cried Sarah. "How perfectly lovely! Now we can take a house — and I've so wanted to!"

"A — house?" — Jared was plainly puzzled.

"Yes, yes, dear — all by ourselves — a nice big one with grounds, I mean. Apartments are so — common, you know. Why, Jared, you've no idea how I've suffered. Seems as though almost every one of my friends in the church lives in a house, while I'm in a horrid flat!"

Jared's knees seemed to give out under him as he walked along the beach. He suddenly felt faint and sick. Suffered? His wife had suffered? And he — he had brought this about? He had made her live where she was unhappy? — he, who had promised to cherish her so tenderly?

"But, Sarah," he moaned, "I can't buy a house — I can't, dear! Don't you understand? I'm not rich. It's only a salary — only a little bit more every month coming in."

His wife laughed merrily.

"You dear old stupid, of course we can't buy one — yet! But we can lease one, can't we?"

"Lease one? — hire one? — of course!" How dull he had been! His face cleared at

once — after all, it was very easy to bring the sunshine into Jared's eyes if there were but Sarah's eyes from which to reflect it.

The Kelseys found a charmingly pretty house facing Franklin Park and not too far from Mrs. Kelsey's church. The rent was high, to be sure, but Sarah had quite set her heart upon this particular house, and, really, there was no other place that satisfied at all. Jared managed to meet the additional outlay without great difficulty, however, for there were some few expenditures for himself that he found he could postpone just as well.

The house was large and demanded the services of at least two maids — Sarah said. Outside there were shrubs, flowers, and a beautiful lawn; this necessitated — again according to Sarah — the hiring of a man for two or three days a week through the summer. Jared tried to persuade her that he could attend to the matter himself, but she seemed so shocked and distressed at the idea of his doing "such day-laborer work," as she termed it, that he gave it up.

There was a neat little stable back of the

house, and before September came Sarah proposed that they keep a horse and carriage. The man could stay all the time then, she said, and he would be so handy to have around for lots of little things. At first Jared demurred; but Sarah pleaded so piteously, and argued that really it was a matter of economy to put the stable to some use instead of allowing it to rest idle on their hands, that he finally yielded — though he was a bit puzzled afterward to understand just wherein lay the force of her argument.

Jared saw a good deal of Hollingsworth these days. Much of Jared's spare cash was given at once into the man's keeping, Hollingsworth still kindly undertaking to "invest" it for him. From time to time Jared received a good-sized check with the announcement that it represented "profits." At such times he listened carefully to Hollingsworth's elaborate explanations, and scrutinized various papers and combinations of figures which, Hollingsworth said, gave an account of the "transactions." It was all a bit puzzling, however, and Jared grew more and more content to leave

all tiresome details to this very good friend, who — Jared was assured — deducted a trifling commission, and was thus paid for his trouble.

The Kelseys lived in a pretty house facing Franklin Park until Dorothy was eighteen; then two of Mrs. Kelsey's friends left Roxbury and moved to Brookline. Coincident with this came to Sarah the realization that she had a young lady daughter on her hands for whom it was most desirable to arrange a wealthy marriage; also that as a setting for ambitious and aspiring young womanhood, Roxbury was far inferior to some other suburb of Boston — Brookline, for instance. For some days she pondered the matter; then she spoke.

"Jared, how long ago was it you became a member of the firm?"

"Almost a year, Sarah. Why?"

"Nothing, only — I was thinking. Seems to me it is about time you were taking a place in the world worthy of your position."

"A place? — my position? My dear, what *do* you mean?"

"Why, Jared, don't you see? You're a business man — you've some standing — you're going to be rich! A cheap little rented house in Roxbury is no place for you!"

Jared laughed long and heartily.

"My dear girl, I'm perfectly satisfied. Don't let it worry you a bit. This is plenty good enough for any dignity I have yet!"

Mrs. Kelsey stirred uneasily.

"But, Jared, I should think you might have some pity on me! And there's Dorothy — what kind of a start are we giving her? She'd stand ever so much better chance in Brookline, dear; don't you see?"

Jared looked puzzled.

"But, Sarah," he demurred, "it is pretty, here — neat, respectable, good neighborhood, fine air —"

"My *dear!*" scorned Sarah, "what's respectability and air when the whole future welfare of our daughter is at stake? If *you* have no conception of what is fitting, thank goodness, *I* have! I tell you, my dear, we've just got to go and live in a more aristocratic neighborhood — and at once, too!"

"Why, of course, Sarah, you know best; but—"

"There, there, I knew your good judgment would conquer in the end," exulted Sarah. "Of course you want to do what is best for Dorothy. We'll go to Brookline right away."

And to Brookline they prepared at once to move.

As a member of the firm Jared's monthly income had increased. By degrees he had accumulated some property in the shape of stocks and bonds over and above the "investments" in Hollingsworth's hands. He was very glad of all this when Sarah told him one day that she had decided they ought to buy their house in Brookline—it gave one more character and dignity to be the owner of one's residence, she said. Still, the price of the only house that Sarah liked was so high that even to pay a quarter of it took all the stocks and bonds, besides calling on Hollingsworth for a part of the money in his possession.

Hollingsworth, too, showed no little annoyance, which disturbed Jared a great deal. Jared felt that his friend had been far too kind

to be troubled now with having to withdraw investments and change plans at an inopportune time, just to accommodate him; and yet, Jared could see no other way, and it had to be done. The Brookline house was bought — part of its price being paid in cash and a mortgage given for the balance — and the family moved in rejoicing — Sarah and Dorothy rejoicing because of the house, and Jared because of them.

Months passed. Jared went earlier to business and stayed later. He fell into his old habits of remaining in town now and then for an evening, too. His hair grew whiter around the temples, and his lips settled into unsmiling lines. There was a troubled look in the depths of his eyes and a loss of elasticity in his step. Day by day he found himself thinking longingly of the old farm back in New Hampshire, and of the restful quiet there when the sun dropped behind the hills in the west.

The buying of the Brookline house sorely crippled Jared financially. His income was hardly sufficient to cover the monthly expenses

—increased to maintain the dignity of the new home. Sarah did not cry for things now —she was long past that. If a wish of hers met with a faint resistance she always had at her command a few cold words of sarcasm and a cutting reference to what was "due" his daughter and his wife.

Into his dealings with Hollingsworth there had come a new note. The man talked now of "unexpected declines," and "unprecedented depreciations of values." He constantly called for "more margin" under threat of entire loss of the principal if this margin were not forthcoming.

Jared was nearly crazed with the thought of it. Should he lose what Hollingsworth held, and forfeit the chance of once more receiving those wondrous checks of "profits," where, indeed, could he turn?

Then came the beginning of the end.

Large sums of the firm's money passed through Jared's hands. It was a simple matter—as Hollingsworth put it—so to "fix" the accounts that a small portion of that money could be used privately without

detection. It would be only a loan, and would do so much; and it could so easily be repaid.

The first — borrowing — was hard. Jared did not sleep for two nights, and even his wife noticed his altered looks. The second borrowing was easier — the first had been repaid within an encouragingly short time. The third borrowing was easier still — and larger. This last was not so fortunate in its results. There came an unforeseen "slump," Hollingsworth said. He prophesied sure ruin if a large sum of money were not in his hands at once. It would mean the loss of all Jared's holdings, and disgrace — as the "borrowing" must then become known.

For the last time Jared borrowed — then came the crash.

Hours afterward the world read this in the newspapers:

> Great sympathy is felt for the beautiful wife of Kelsey, the embezzler. She is known to be a deeply religious, cultured gentlewoman, prominent in society, church, and philanthropic work of all kinds. The conduct of her husband is a great blow to her. It is indeed a pity that the innocent are so often made to suffer for the deeds of the guilty.

Escorting Harriet

THE telephone bell rang sharply and Edward Kenton jerked off the receiver with an impatient hand. Already he had answered that bell three times since Miss Gray went out for her early luncheon, and his desk was piled high with work.

"Hello!"

"Oh, Jack, I'm so glad it's you," called an agitated feminine voice.

The man's lips parted and began to utter a denial of the name, but the feminine voice rushed on with a volubility that swept all before it.

"I was so afraid it would be that tiresomely slow girl of yours, and I haven't one minute to spare. Now listen carefully. I can't stop to repeat. Gladys and Harriet are coming into Boston to-day at half-past twelve, on their way to New York. I had agreed to meet them at the North Station, up in the main

waiting-room, near the parcel-checking windows; but I simply can't. Never mind why. I've bought their Pullman seats and tickets, and left them in the city ticket office in the Ames Building, *in your name*. I said Mr. Proctor would call for them. Now, Jack, you'll *have* to go and get the tickets, then meet the girls and take them across the city. Their New York train leaves at two."

"But—" Once more Kenton attempted to speak, and once more he was ruthlessly silenced.

"Oh, I know they *could* go at one, but John is to meet the two, and—there's Ned calling me this minute, and I've *got* to go. Now remember, North Station, half-past twelve. And thank you awfully, Jack. You're a dear! Good-bye!"

"But, madam, I—" A sharp click told Kenton that further words were useless; and with a shrug and a grim smile he hung up the receiver.

"Well, by George!" he muttered. "I've been called up as 'most everything, from an undertaker to a plumber, but never before—

oh, I say, Great Scott! this is serious," he broke off suddenly. The next instant he was at the telephone again.

"Look a-here," he fumed, "I had a call just a minute ago. Can't I *somehow* find out where that call came from?"

"I'll connect you with the chief operator," murmured a cheerfully impersonal voice; and a moment later Kenton was repeating his plea into another unseen ear. He finished with an anxious "It's important, I tell you, very important that I should know where that call came from. I cannot tell you how much depends upon it."

At the chief operator's final promise to do her best, Kenton settled back in his chair, and began to plan what he would say.

He could not, probably, reach the woman who had been speaking. But if he could get the house, there would be somebody in it, of course, who would know "Jack," and who would see that he was properly notified to meet "Gladys" and "Harriet," whoever they might be.

It seemed an interminable wait, but at last

chief operator reported: the call could not be located.

Kenton, now thoroughly aroused to the seriousness of the situation, sprang to his feet and tramped up and down the office.

"Great Scott, what a mess!" he growled, pulling out his watch. "In less than an hour they'll be there, waiting — this precious pair of them — no tickets, no escort, no nothing! They may be five or fifty — Heaven knows; I don't. But they evidently aren't able to take care of themselves, and that idiotic woman rests easy now because 'Jack' will do it. Jack — "

Kenton stopped short, his frown deepening. At thought of the name a new idea had come to him. The woman had called him "Jack," and had said that "Mr. Proctor" would call for the tickets. "Jack Proctor." Why not he himself find this Jack Proctor and set the matter straight? Of course! And with a relieved exclamation Kenton turned to the telephone directory.

There was a half-column of Proctors, but not one Jack among them. There were two

Johns, and a J. A., a J. C., and a J. M. Reflecting, however, that "Jack" was doubtless a nickname for "John," Kenton eyed the Johns speculatively. The first was a hair-dresser, the second a lawyer. Dismissing the hair-dresser with a frowning shake of the head, Kenton took down the telephone receiver and called the lawyer's number sharply.

So prompt was the answer that it caught him unawares. He realized then that he had not planned at all what he should say, so he sat, and said absolutely nothing.

"Well?" The voice was curt and hurried. "Well?"

Kenton made an unsuccessful effort to clear his throat.

"Er — ah — ah — Mr. Proctor?" he stammered weakly.

"Yes, yes; Right here!"

"Well, — er — that is, do you — do you know any — any Gladys and Harriet that — "

"Wha-at?"

Kenton giggled like a hysterical schoolgirl.

"I know, Mr. Proctor, it does sound nutty;

but I'm looking for a Mr. Proctor who knows a Gladys and a Harriet who—"

"Well, you'll have to look farther than this, then," and down clicked the receiver.

A cold sweat sprang to Kenton's forehead. With a shrug and an uplifted eyebrow he turned to the telephone book again.

"Hm-m," he murmured, running his finger down the Proctors. "'J. A. Proctor, Residence.' I won't risk it there—not with a Gladys and Harriet. 'J. C. Proctor, Physician.' She'd never send a doctor on a noonday chase like that. 'J. M. Proctor, Real Estate.' All right, J. M., here goes!" And, with a chin set determinedly, Kenton jerked the receiver from the hook.

"Mr. Proctor?" he asked when his call was answered.

"Yes."

"Well, is your name—that is, are you ever called 'Jack'?"

"No, I'm not; but if I were, I fail to see what business 't is of yours, sir. I'll bid you good-day, sir." And down went *his* receiver.

"Oh, I like this," ejaculated Kenton aloud,

an ominous glitter coming to his eyes. "I like this real well!" He had almost snapped the book shut when he spied the name "T. Jackson Proctor" near the bottom of the page. For a moment he eyed it frowningly; then, with a resigned sigh, he faced the telephone again.

A clearly sweet feminine voice answered this time.

"Hello-o?"

"Hello. Is Mr. Proctor there — Mr. Jackson Proctor?"

"Yes, sir. What name shall I give him?"

"Well, he — he would n't know my name if I gave it. I would like to speak to him a minute, please."

"Then perhaps you 'll tell your business, please." The voice was a little colder now.

"Well — er — to tell the truth, that, too, he would n't understand, except from me."

"Then I 'm afraid, sir, you cannot speak to Mr. Proctor," declared the voice importantly. "Mr. Proctor is very busy, and my orders are never to disturb him except for plainly stated business."

There was a moment's pause; then Kenton, with exaggerated suavity, observed:

"Oh! No? Very well, then. Will you be so good as to ask Mr. Jackson Proctor if he will kindly meet Gladys and Harriet at the North Station at twelve-thirty this afternoon?"

"I beg p-pardon, sir?" The voice was faint with horror. Kenton had his revenge. Again, even more suavely, he gave directions.

He had not long to wait. It was a masculine voice this time.

"Who in thunder are you, and what do you want?" it roared.

Kenton laughed.

"I want what I've got — you," he declared boldly. "Look a-here, I've had a telephone message by mistake. One Jack Proctor is wanted to meet one Gladys and one Harriet at the North Station this afternoon, and I'm trying to find him. Do you happen to know that man?"

There was a dazed pause, then a chuckling explosion at the other end of the line. A moment later came words thick with laughter:

"Not on your life, my friend! But I'm sure I wish you joy in your quest. I would suggest, however, that you exercise a little more caution in firing off those names. You've already caused one case of near hysterics in this office by your rashness—my stenographer happens to be my wife. Good-bye, and good luck to you!"

With a gesture of abandonment Kenton tossed the telephone directory aside and pushed away the instrument. His manner said, "Adieu, Gladys, Harriet, I've done my best." Then, resolutely, he turned to his papers; but he did not work.

Miss Gray came in, removed her hat and coat, and sat down to her desk, all with the quiet unobtrusiveness that made her the treasure that she was. Still Kenton sat, his eyes out the window, his forehead knotted into a prodigious frown. At last, almost furtively, he glanced at his watch. The next moment he was on his feet, reaching for his hat.

"Miss Gray, I'm obliged to be away for an hour or two. I've got to meet—er—

some people at the station. If Falmouth comes at two o'clock, ask him to wait, please. I shall not be very long after that."

It was twenty minutes past twelve when Kenton hurried out of the Ames Building, tucking into his pocket an envelope marked "Mr. J. S. Proctor." With a quick "North Station" hurled at the waiting chauffeur, he jumped into the taxicab and found himself, as he grimly expressed it, "in for it."

On the way he had a few minutes for thought.

What would Gladys and Harriet look like? Would they be two near-to infants, or a pair of timid, gray-haired spinster "girls"?

He could not know them, of course; but there would not be apt to be in that one particular corner many pairs of unescorted females plainly on the lookout for some one to meet them. He could find the right ones without doubt.

It would be embarrassing, of course; but, after all, this thing that he was doing was merely a matter of courtesy that had been

inadvertently thrust upon him, and he must look at it in that light. He would escort the ladies to their train across the city as any gentleman would; and he would make as little talk about it as possible, too. He would not tell — at first, anyway — the peculiar circumstances of the telephone message. It would be startling, and very probably annoying, to the ladies to feel that they were in the care of and under obligations to a man unknown to any of their friends. At the very last, perhaps, if opportunity offered, he might explain; but for the present he would be merely Mr. Kenton, a friend who had come in "Jack's" place; and certainly he was a friend to do what he was doing now. That part, surely, was not open to question, decided Kenton, as he stepped from the taxicab, instructed the man to wait, and hurried into the station.

As he neared the corner by the parcel-checking windows, Kenton moved more slowly. At a safe distance he stopped and looked.

In one seat an old man sat and dozed. In

another a pretty girl read a magazine. Across from her two little girls, perhaps nine years old, brought a swifter beat to Kenton's heart until he saw that a man was there with them. Near them a young woman was trying to keep two small boys contented and happy. Nowhere could Kenton see any couple that could by any chance be Gladys and Harriet; and he was just pulling out his watch to compare it with the great clock on the wall when through the swinging doors came two young girls chattering volubly. They gave one wide-sweeping glance about them, looked at the clock, shook their heads, and then promptly dropped themselves into adjoining seats and went on talking.

Almost as promptly the watching man started toward them, but at the fourth step he fell back; he had heard one call the other "Helen." He was not looking for a Helen.

Five, seven, eight minutes passed. Twice Kenton had started forward again; once toward a pair of old ladies who seemed nervous and afraid, and once toward two timid-looking young women. But the old ladies had

found a friend just in time, and the younger ones had stopped only for a bag at the delivery window before hurrying away.

It was then that Kenton began to notice the pretty girl who had been reading the magazine. She had stopped reading, and was gazing anxiously toward the street doors. At quarter of one she got up nervously and began to walk back and forth, yet not too far from her suitcase. Always her eyes sought either the clock or the outer door. Plainly she was watching anxiously for some one.

It was borne in upon Kenton then that here before him was either Gladys or Harriet. The other, for some reason, had been detained, of course, and the one had come alone. But which one?

At that moment the girl picked up her bag nervously, and Kenton almost exclaimed aloud with delight. Unhesitatingly then he marched straight toward her. He had seen the letters H. A. M. on the bag.

"Miss — Harriet?" he asked, hat in hand.

"Yes, oh, yes!" cried the girl joyously. "Did Aunt Jennie—" She stopped and drew

back, on her face the unmistakable "mother-says-I-must n't-talk-to-strangers" expression.

Kenton smiled reassuringly.

"She could n't come, and she wanted Jack to; but he — he could n't either. I could, however, and did. My name is Kenton — Edward Kenton. You see, I'll have to introduce myself."

"Oh, Mr. Kenton, I'm so glad you did come. I was so worried! Have we time? It's ten minutes of one!"

"Lots of time! I have a taxicab waiting at the door, and we'll be there before you know it. You have a trunk, I suppose?"

"Yes; here's the check, thank you. Oh, I don't know what I should have done if you had n't come, Mr. Kenton. I'm so glad you did!"

"So am I," declared the man fervently, as he stooped to pick up her suitcase; and to hear him, one would not suspect that for one hour past he had been doing nothing but trying to get out of coming.

It was not until they were on their way toward the South Station that Kenton asked:

"And Miss Gladys? I thought she was to be with you."

"She could n't come. She sprained her ankle last night. Mrs. Tolman fretted dreadfully about my coming alone, and urged me to wait over for Gladys; but I 've simply got to be in NewYork to-morrow for a class reunion. Besides, there was n't a bit of reason why I should n't come. My train goes straight through, and father will meet me there. Of course I don't know Boston very well, but I had Aunt Jennie for here, you know."

"Yes; I see you had — Aunt Jennie," returned the man a little grimly.

The girl laughed.

"You said Aunt Jennie's name just as mother does. Did you know it?"

"No. Why?"

"Oh, I suspect you both think alike about her. Of course every one who knows Aunt Jennie thinks she's a dear. And she *is* a dear; is n't she?"

"She is," declared the man; and again there was a fervid note of emphasis in his tone.

"Well, mother thinks that, too; but she says Aunt Jennie is the most irresponsible creature that ever breathed. And do you think that?"

"Er — well, yes, I might say that I do think she is — a little irresponsible."

"She does such funny things."

"She does."

"Actually, Mrs. Tolman — she adores Aunt Jennie, you know — but she pretended she was n't sure I 'd get the Pullman seats or the tickets if Aunt Jennie had the charge of them. But, you see, I have; that is, I suppose she gave them to you?"

The girl turned questioningly, a half-fear in her eyes.

"Oh, I have those tickets all right," returned Kenton gayly, hoping his face did not look quite so red as it suddenly felt. "And here we are at the station with a world of time to spare," he finished, as the taxicab came to a stop.

A little later, in the waiting-room, he said, as he dropped down at her side:

"There, everything is shipshape. Your

trunk is checked; you have your ticket, your seat-check, and your time-table. We know where your train starts from, and we still have more than half an hour to kill. Now how shall we kill it?"

The girl threw him a demure glance.

"Suppose we let you choose the weapons, Mr. Kenton, as long as you proposed the conflict."

"Very good! Then I shall choose knives and forks, with maybe a teaspoon thrown in for emergencies; that is, I was going to ask you anyway. Aren't you hungry? Have you had luncheon?"

Not without some thought had Kenton asked this question. He wondered which "Aunt Jennie" would prefer — that Harriet should go hungry, or that she should take luncheon alone with a strange man in a public dining-room. Conscious, however, that an army of Aunt Jennies, had they known his true character and all the circumstances, could have no objections to himself as an escort, and conscious, also, of his own clamorous appetite, he had put the question.

The girl laughed softly and sprang to her feet.

"What a funny man you are, Mr. Kenton!" she exclaimed. "And I am about starved, really. You see, Aunt Jennie said we'd have time for luncheon. There, now, isn't this lovely?" she cried gleefully, a little later, when the spotlessly white table lay between them. "Now I guess Jack wishes he had come."

As it happened, Jack was wishing at that very moment that he had "come," for two minutes before he had been hailed by an agitated feminine voice from a motor-car on Commonwealth Avenue. Jack was on the sidewalk. The motor-car had just drawn up to the curbstone.

"Jack! Jack Proctor, what in the world is the meaning of this? What have you done with Gladys and Harriet?"

"Oh, Aunt Jennie, it's you, is it?" returned Jack pleasantly, doffing his hat.

"Yes, yes; but, Jack, what *have* you done with Gladys and Harriet?"

"You may search me. I haven't done any-

thing with them, Aunt Jennie," laughed the man teasingly. "What are they, lost, strayed, or— Why, Aunt Jennie, what is it?" This last in response to the frightened terror that had come into the woman's face.

"Why, Jack, didn't you understand? Didn't you get my meaning? I told you to meet them at the North Station at half-past twelve. Didn't you go?"

"You *told* me! When?"

"Over the telephone at eleven o'clock; I *told* you!"

"Why, Aunt Jennie, you're dreaming; I haven't had a word from you to-day. Absolutely not a word!"

"But you answered—'twas a man's voice. I said—"

She stopped suddenly, her face growing very white. Her next words were incoherent in their frenzy. "Oh, Jack, Jack, what have I done? It was another man I told; it must have been! And those blessed girls, what will they do?—no ticket, no mileage, and there at that station all this time alone, unless—Jack, Jack, get in here, quick!

We've got to find them! What if that man I told—went himself? And nobody knows who or what *he* is! Oh, Jack, Jack, what shall I do, what shall I do?"

Jack was already in the car at her side.

"Do? We'll find them, of course," he retorted with grim determination. "Don't worry, Aunt Jennie; we'll find them all right, with nothing worse than a train lost—and maybe not that," he finished, with a smile that was a little forced. Jack was indeed wishing that he had "come."

At the South Station the girl and the man were chatting like old friends, so very potent is the influence of a little white table set for two.

"Isn't it funny," murmured the girl, after a time, "it seems now as if I'd known you always, Mr. Kenton; yet I don't remember ever hearing either Jack or Aunt Jennie speak of you."

"No? Oh, well, that's not so strange. We don't always speak of every one we know."

Kenton spoke lightly, with an elaborate

air of indifference. In reality the situation was beginning to worry him — this telling her that he knew neither Aunt Jennie, Jack, nor her own surname, was going to be no easy matter. Yet he knew it must be done, else she would find it out later and think — well, he did not mean that she should find it out later and think — anything. She should find it out from himself. He wanted her to, anyway; otherwise this delightful acquaintance must end right there and then; for, of course, with only an unfindable "Jack Proctor," an intangible "Aunt Jennie," and a surnameless "Harriet" for clues, he could not hope ever to see her again. And not to see this winsome, altogether charming little maid again was, to Edward Kenton, unthinkable.

She must be told, surely, and by himself; he realized that, only — well, there was no hurry. He need not tell her now. In the very nature of things, their intercourse could not be so refreshingly easy and unembarrassed after she knew that he was quite unknown to any of her friends. (Kenton was still remembering that "mother-says-I-must n't-talk-to-

strangers" air.) It would be better to wait until the very last few minutes, then there would be no chance for stiffness or discomposure of mind. He would tell in a few words how he happened to be there, beg to know her name and address, and sue for permission to write and explain all more fully. Then, of course, he could meet Aunt Jennie, and Jack, and Gladys, and later perhaps Father and Mother, and — indeed, there was no end to the delightful possibilities after that. But meanwhile — meanwhile he must undeniably go on with the little comedy he was playing. He must be "Jack's friend"; and so very lightly he asked:

"Do you, Miss Harriet, always speak of every one you know to — every one else you know?"

"Why, of course not; but I think I should speak of *you!*" She stopped suddenly, bit her lip, and blushed adorably.

Kenton, fully alive to the sweet flattery, was only the more determined to set her at her ease.

"Would you?" he laughed smoothly.

"Well, now, that is good of you; but, you see, others might not be so kind."

"But how—how long have you known Jack, anyway?" asked the girl with obvious haste.

Kenton caught his breath a little quickly.

"Er—h-how long?" he stammered. "Oh, not long—really, not long. But—er—tell me about yourself, Miss Harriet, and—and what you've been doing."

A little puzzled frown appeared for a moment on the girl's forehead. The next instant it was gone.

"I? Why, there's nothing to tell. I've just been visiting Mrs. Tolman, and I'm going home now. Didn't Jack tell you that?"

"No. I only know that you're going home—to New York," he finished with confidence, remembering the father who was to be at the Grand Central.

The girl looked up quickly. The little frown was again between her eyes.

"Why, did Jack say—" She checked herself abruptly, and Kenton did not ask her to go on; the less she concerned herself about

what Jack said, the less he had to concern himself about what to answer. He had just opened his mouth to introduce a subject miles away from Jack when, with an odd little settling of herself in her chair, the girl asked very sweetly:

"How is Jack, Mr. Kenton? Is he well?"

The man stirred a little restlessly.

"Why — er — I think so."

"And his — wife?"

"I think so; at least, I don't know — that she is sick."

"No, I don't either."

There was an odd little something in the girl's voice that made Kenton look up hurriedly; but the girl's eyes were on the bit of bread she was spreading. She seemed to be thinking of nothing but that. In a moment she glanced up.

"Don't you just love to hear him play — Jack, I mean?"

"Why, of — of course! Does n't every one love to hear him?" he answered evasively.

"But it's so funny about his hair, you know!"

"Er—yes, 'tis." Kenton pulled out his watch with a nervous hand.

The girl, for some apparent reason, laughed.

"You know musicians have long hair always," she began, with an oddly direct glance straight into her companion's eyes, "while Jack—dear me! isn't he bald?"

"Yes, isn't he!" echoed Kenton faintly. Then, with resolute briskness he added, "And now, Miss Harriet, if you've quite finished, perhaps we'd better be looking up that train of yours."

She rose at once.

"Perhaps we had," she said demurely.

Her voice was impersonality itself, but Kenton, throwing a quick glance into her eyes, detected a merry twinkle which did not tend to put him at his ease.

He realized, too, with a sinking heart, that not much longer could he postpone the evil moment that was soon to be his. He wished now that he had told her before. Nothing could be harder than this.

Twice during their walk through the huge

train-shed Kenton tried to speak, but in vain. Not until they had passed through the gateway and begun their long walk down the narrow platform between the cars, did he bring his courage to the point.

"Miss Harriet, I've a confession to make," he burst out miserably; but he got no farther. Behind them sounded the quick tread of hurrying feet, and an agitated call of "Harriet! Harriet Marston!"

They turned to confront a palpitating, pale-faced woman, and a good-looking but rather stern-faced man.

"Oh, Harriet, Harriet, I'm thankful I've found you," panted the lady; "but where's Gladys? What's he done with Gladys?"

Kenton grew red, then white. For one brief instant righteous indignation sent an angry light to his eyes. Then, as his gaze swept the puzzled, the menacing, and the stern countenances of the girl, the woman, and the man, he suddenly threw back his head and laughed. Almost instantly, however, he controlled himself. Toward the lady he turned with a grave bow.

"This is 'Aunt Jennie,' I suppose," he hazarded.

To his surprise it was the girl who answered. The merry twinkle had come back to her eyes.

"Yes," she said sweetly. "And this is 'Jack,' Mr. Kenton. You see, I know you'll have to be introduced to him, because he really hasn't got any wife, he doesn't know one tune from another, and his hair is like a mop for thickness. Jack, take off your bonnet; Mr. Kenton thinks you're bald."

Just how much explanation four people can crowd into four minutes, and at the same time listen to all the explanations that the other three are making, it would be hard to say; but certainly the four people on that platform that day did their best to find out. At the end Aunt Jennie's voice rose dominantly:

"But, Jack, I don't see how it could have happened. I know I called for one-one-o-two-five!"

"Oh, you did, did you?" demanded Jack, turning quickly.

"Yes, I know I did."

"Very well, that explains it, then. You see, my number is not one-one-o-two-five, but one-o-one-two-five."

"Oh-h!" breathed Aunt Jennie. "And yours?"—to Mr. Kenton fearfully.

"The one you called," bowed Kenton, "one-one-o-two-five."

"Oh-h!" breathed Aunt Jennie again.

Later, in the car, Kenton had his chance.

"And you—*knew?*" he said low in Harriet's ear, lingering behind the others.

She glanced up mischievously.

"Oh, no; I could n't exactly know; but I did guess something was wrong when you told me Jack said I was going *home* to New York. So I tested you, and you failed on them all."

"Then you don't live in New York?"

She shook her head.

"Where, *please?*" he urged. "You see, I want to write—if I may—to—to explain more fully—please!"

She shook her head again, mischievously; then she dimpled into a smile and murmured the name of a small town thirty miles out from New York.

"Oh, I'll tell you that, of course," she added merrily; "for, you see, even now you don't know my name, and you can't address a letter to 'Miss Harriet'!"

"But I don't have to, Miss — Marston."

She looked up with startled eyes.

"Why, how —"

"When your aunt called you — a few minutes ago," smiled Kenton.

"Oh, how could you?" Her voice was all reproach, but her eyes were dancing.

"I could n't," called back Kenton softly, hurrying after Aunt Jennie, who was waiting rather pointedly at the door. "I could n't — if my telephone number had n't been one-one-o-two-five!"

A Case of the Inevitable

MISS WENTWORTH rose earlier than usual that morning. She was always an early riser, but even her careful economy of time seldom called for this gray, chilly hour of four. She prepared her frugal breakfast and ate it with decorous precision as to manners, though her motions betrayed unwonted haste. Then she swept and scrubbed the already spotless kitchen floor, and scoured the dishpans into mimic mirrors.

In the sitting-room and the somber parlor, she gently brushed the dustless surfaces of the tables and chairs with a square of cheesecloth having a buttonholed edge of pale blue worsted, after which she ascended the front stairs to her chamber. Here she pounded, patted, and smoothed the feather bed and pillows into proper puffiness, and put away her gray bedroom slippers that lay, heels together and toes out, on the floor at the foot of the bed.

A Case of the Inevitable

It was ten o'clock before Miss Wentworth had reduced the little cottage to a satisfactory state of spotless nicety. Then she drew a long breath and sat down to read, for the fifth time, a letter that she took from her pocket. Her nostrils dilated and her cheeks deepened in color as she read:

Beggar's Creek, Col., May 15, 1900.

DEAR LITTLE WOMAN: Though it's been some time since you've heard from me, yet I'm sure you hain't forgot me, for you was a wonderful faithful little girl when I left you twenty years ago.

Well, Jane, I've made my pile and I'm coming home to you. Have you waited for me? I ain't saying but what twenty years is a good while to ask any girl to wait, and I ain't saying that I've been as good to write as I might have been. But your picture has gone with me always, wherever I've been, Jane, and, well, it's kinder helped to keep me the man I know you'd want me to be.

Luck was dead against me—let me see, when did you get my last letter anyhow? I reckon you hain't heard nothing since the fall of ninety-five. Well, as I said, luck was dead against me until I struck it rich a year ago. There's more to be had if I stay, but I'm lonesome, Jane. I need you. I want to get back to God's country again. I'm coming home.

I 'm forty now, little woman. Did you know it? I am, sure thing. Have you got a kiss waiting for an old feller like that, a kiss as sweet as the one you gave the twenty-year-old youngster long ago? I 'm going to come and see. I oughter get there sometime the 27th. What if I should find you married? But then, I won't.

Good-bye till then, NED GARNER.

And to-day was the 27th!

A wave of vivid color surged over Jane Wentworth's face and neck, and the coarsely written sheets fluttered in her hands. Of course, she was glad — she must be — people were always glad when their lovers came to see them. And — Mr. Garner had been gone so long, too; it would be very uncivil not to give him a warm welcome. But she did n't believe she ever could call him "Ned." Was it possible she had done that in the past? She might venture on "Edward," but "Ned" — ! And that kiss, too! Miss Wentworth caught her breath with a little gasp and looked furtively around the room. But he expected it — he said he did; she would n't want to be uncivil — and to a guest!

After a very early dinner, Miss Wentworth

made a careful toilet. She looked long and attentively into her little mirror and wistfully smoothed with her fingers two tiny wrinkles between her eyebrows. She fastened a blue ribbon bow at her throat after spending fifteen minutes trying to decide whether that or a red one was the more becoming.

She had scarcely finished dressing when a resounding peal of her front-door bell startled her into breathless agitation. Her trembling limbs almost refused to do her bidding, but she managed to reach the door and timidly turn the knob. A moment later, flushed and frightened, she emerged from a crushing embrace to find a big, bronze-bearded man holding her two limp hands.

"It's Jane, the same Jane — only twenty years better!" he exclaimed joyfully; and the woman felt a stinging remorse lashing her into a proper appreciation of this strong man's love. "Ah, Jane, it is good to see ye, now — sure enough!" said the big fellow a moment later, settling himself as comfortably as possible in the limited capacity of the largest chair the room contained.

The chair creaked ominously with its unusual burden, and Miss Wentworth started in some apprehension. "It's — it's good to see you, too, Mr. Garner," she murmured timidly.

"'Mr. Garner,'" repeated the man in huge disgust — "'Mr. Garner'! Why, Jane, are ye goin' to hold me off at the end of a 'mister'?"

"Well — Edward, then," corrected Jane faintly.

Ned Garner laughed — a laugh that filled the room to overflowing, and caused Miss Wentworth to jump nervously.

"You dear little piece of propriety!" he exclaimed. "Is that all yer goin' to call me when we're married?"

"Married!" gasped Jane.

He was grave at once.

"Jane, have I come East to find an unwillin' pardner? Didn't ye know what I wanted? Didn't — but it's nothin' but what I might have known," he added bitterly; "I am old, and battered, and no sort o' good. You don't love me — and no wonder!"

"Indeed, indeed I do," insisted the remorse-

ful Jane quickly, "but it's so — sudden!" unconsciously hesitating over the trite phrase.

A somber smile flickered across Ned Garner's face.

"Sudden, dear? There ain't many what would call a twenty-one-year courtship 'sudden,' I'm thinkin'."

Miss Wentworth was plainly disturbed. This big man — her guest — did not look happy. The fault lay clearly in herself. She must make amends.

"Yes, I know; but I have lost you for quite a while, you see," she explained anxiously. "I have lived all alone since mother died, and I've grown silly and nervous. I — I shall get used to — to you right away, I'm sure."

Garner smiled contentedly.

"That's all right, little woman — take yer time," he said, emphasizing his words with gentle pats of his great fingers on the slim little hand that rested on the arm of the sofa near him. "We'll soon have ye out of this bird's nest of a house. I'm goin' to have a shack of my own. I thought up on the hill by Squire Green's would be a purty good place

to stake a claim. Purty good location, don't you think? What d' ye say?"

"What, leave here?"—Jane's voice was full of horror.

"Why, I reckon so," answered Garner in surprise. "You don't expect me to come and camp here, do ye, dear?"

Jane turned a grieved face away.

"Very well; you need not, if you do not wish to; but"—with great firmness—"I shall certainly stay here to the end of my days. I could never be happy anywhere else. It's—it's a very dear bird's nest to me," she finished with quivering lips.

Ned Garner was amazed, and he was not pleased. Something strained sharply within him, but his tones were even when he spoke.

"Well, well—no offense was meant, little pardner. I s'posed all women liked new houses and things. I reckon there ain't nothin' to hinder our stayin' here—that is, if you'll let me buy a new chair for myself—a big strong chair!" he added, as the one beneath him gave another warning creak.

Miss Wentworth joined in his merry laugh,

and it cleared the atmosphere as nothing else could have done. Before he left her that afternoon, she had timidly consented to a speedy marriage, but he had not reached his hotel before she was frightened at what she had done, and wished that she could take back her word.

Suddenly she spied on the floor where Ned Garner's feet had rested two little mounds of dirt tracked in from the street. It was the work of a moment to produce dustpan and brush, and carefully remove the unwelcome intrusion; and it was while on her hands and knees that she saw the glove on the floor — a big, strong-looking glove, like the man who had dropped it.

Miss Wentworth gazed at that glove in strange fascination, then she picked it up gingerly and dropped it on the table. How queer it looked beside the blue-and-gold books of poems and her photograph album! How would it seem to have such things around all the time — gloves, and boots, and — things!

Miss Wentworth gasped and reached a hesitating hand for the interloper. She

peeped inside its mysterious depths, and sniffed daintily at the leather. Ugh!—tobacco! She had almost dropped the offending thing, when a great rip in the finger caught her eye. Her woman's heart responded at once. Poor fellow! No wonder he wanted some one to care for him! And after all—he was a nice big man—good to have round the house—burglars and tramps would not dare to come! She smoothed the glove tenderly and carried it off to be mended.

The next few weeks passed quickly. The modest trousseau and the plans for a wedding trip occupied all of Miss Wentworth's attention. She was frightened and nervous at times, but the big man soothed and comforted her, and seemed himself to take things so easily, and so much as a matter of course, that she was little by little reassured.

The wedding was a quiet one in the church where Jane was baptized thirty-eight years before, and Mr. and Mrs. Garner left on the afternoon train for New York. Jane never forgot that wedding journey. She had traveled but little in the past years of her life, but

she suddenly discovered an unexpected love for it, and her husband, rejoicing in her pleasure, would have prolonged the trip indefinitely, but at the end of a month Jane's slumbering conscience awoke, and she declared that she had been absent from her house and her church work quite long enough. She must go home at once — and home they went.

The little vine-covered cottage looked beautiful to Jane, but oh, the dust within! She waged a prompt and energetic warfare on this accumulated iniquity before she had been in the house ten minutes. Her husband fled in dismay, nor did he return until the pangs of an empty stomach sent him back.

He marveled at the dainty supper he found awaiting him, though he remembered that Jane had insisted on stopping at the corner grocery on the way home. He praised the light tea-biscuit, and there was a quizzical smile on his face as he deftly balanced one of the white puffy things on his forefinger and held it up on a level with his eyes.

"Well, little pardner, these ain't much like our sinkers, sure enough!"

"Sinkers?" queried Jane with uplifted eyebrow.

"Yes; skillet bread — baked in a kettle, or like as not in a gold-pan, if that 's any handier," he explained, with a short laugh at Jane's growing horror as his meaning became clear to her.

He expressed his unqualified approval of the fragrant coffee, too, but he followed his wife with thoughtful eyes as she washed the supper dishes.

"Oh, I say, Jane, you oughter have a girl to do that kind of work," he finally said with decision.

Mrs. Garner sniffed disdainfully.

"A girl? — me? I would n't have one 'round! Edward, there 's some dirt on your shoes. I wish you 'd take the brush out in the woodshed and clean them."

A slow red crept over the man's cheek. By the time he opened the kitchen door the color had reached his forehead. He said nothing and closed the door gently behind him.

It was five o'clock the next morning when Jane stole softly out of bed and dressed her-

self in her familiar work-gown. An hour and a half later, she was fidgeting nervously about the kitchen, hovering between the stove and a daintily laid breakfast-table. Twice she went to the foot of the stairs and listened anxiously. The second time she spoke. "Edward!" No reply. "Edward!" a little louder. Still silence. "Ed—ward! Breakfast is spoiling. I do wish you 'd come down!"

A thump of bare feet on the floor above shook the house. "Yes, yes, my dear, I 'm a-comin'," replied a voice full of sleep and contrition. "I 'm sure, I—I beg yer pardon!"

In a surprisingly short time the owner of the voice appeared—not very well groomed, perhaps, but with an evident attempt at looking very much awake.

"I 'm sorry I kept ye waitin', little woman, but ye see, I 've had to turn out so blamed early all my life that now it seems mighty good to lie abed."

Jane looked troubled.

"I know dear—that 's why I let you sleep."

"Let me sleep?" he murmured in stupid repetition.

Jane nodded. "Yes, I delayed breakfast a half-hour."

Her husband pulled out his watch.

"But it's quarter of seven!"

"Well, three-quarters of an hour, then," corrected Jane, smilingly.

Ned Garner's lower jaw dropped.

"Do ye mean t' say that six o'clock is yer regular breakfast time, Jane?" he asked in dismay.

"I certainly do," she declared with reddening cheeks. "I think it's healthy to get up early, and I always approved of it."

The man flushed with anger, then his countenance changed and he laughed good-humoredly.

"All right, little pardner, I'll be a martyr to the cause. We'll be healthy, and you shall have yer breakfast whenever ye like."

"No, it shall be late — very late — just when you wish. It shall be at seven o'clock," asserted the remorseful wife in a burst of unselfishness; and from that day she, down in the kitchen, fumed and fretted in distressed idleness over the "wasted morning hour,"

while upstairs he, in equal perturbation, valiantly tried to wake himself up for Jane's "late breakfast."

When Jane went upstairs to the bedroom that first morning, she stopped just inside the door with a cry of dismay. The window, indeed, was properly open, but the bedclothes lay in a worm-like roll across the sheet just as her husband had left them. A coat and vest adorned the back of one chair, and a pair of slippers the seat of another, while her dressing-case was covered with an array of very masculine-looking collars and ties.

"Edward," said Mrs. Garner to her husband at the dinner-table that day, "don't they have — er — bureaus for — men?"

"They certainly do — sure thing," replied the man, with a slight quivering of his eyelid.

"Well — I want one."

Ned Garner laughed outright.

"I told ye, little woman, the shack wan't big enough for me. Most ready to have another one?"

Jane shook her head decidedly.

Late that afternoon a pretty chiffonier,

of her husband's choosing, was added to the furniture of her room. With the chiffonier came a big morris-chair which Ned wheeled into the sitting-room. Two hours later, it was nowhere to be seen.

"Oh, I say, Jane, where's my chair?" he questioned, with frowning brow.

"Your new chair?"

"Sure, the one I bought this afternoon."

"Why, in the parlor, of course."

"But, Jane, I bought that chair to sit in," remonstrated the man gently, "and you've shut up the parlor and say it's too good to use."

"You didn't mean to sit in that brand-new chair every day!" exclaimed his wife in unfeigned amazement.

"Well, I reckon I did," affirmed Garner, as he walked into the gloomy parlor and trundled the chair out from its imprisonment.

When he had wheeled his new possession up to the little center-table where the lamp would shine to best advantage, he settled himself luxuriously, and opened his paper with a sigh of content. By and by he stirred

uneasily and glanced with evident apprehension at his wife. Then he got up and walked aimlessly around the room. Finally he came back to his seat with new determination on his face. From one pocket he took a cigar, from another a match. At the telltale scratch, Jane looked up in consternation.

"Why, Edward!"

"Yes, dear" (puff—puff).

"Have you always smoked?"

"As long as I can remember" (puff—puff).

A fleeting thought of something she had read brought a wrinkle of anxiety to Jane's forehead.

"Does—does it make folks sick if they leave off smoking suddenly—all at once?"

"It does—sure thing!" asserted the man with wicked alacrity.

"Well, Edward, then I wish you'd go out in the kitchen and smoke until—until you get so you can stop entirely."

"Do ye mean yer ain't willin' that I should smoke here, Jane?" he asked gravely, suddenly sitting bolt upright. Jane nodded, with

pink cheeks, and her husband rose slowly and left the room. Out in the kitchen he sat on a hard chair, pondering many things.

It was the next evening that he missed his paper which he had laid on the table an hour before.

"My paper, dear — you hain't seen it anywheres round, have ye?" he asked.

"Yes; you will find it on the top shelf of the kitchen cupboard," replied Jane with a pleasant smile.

"But — I hain't read it!"

"I know it; that's why I saved it. It's perfectly safe there."

"I should think likely 't was," he acknowledged dryly. "But ain't the top shelf in the kitchen cupboard kind of a queer place to keep the daily paper in, Jane?"

The little woman's figure stiffened, and her lips twitched.

"It's where our family has always kept papers, Mr. Garner." Then she glanced at the man's disturbed face and relented a bit. "We might keep them on the lower shelf, Edward."

"WHY, EDWARD!"

Ned laughed.

"Thank ye, dear. Er — you would n't want 'em in here, I s'pose," he suggested mildly.

"Well, they do clutter up so; of course, if you want them — "

"No, I don't, Jane — indeed I don't!" interrupted the man quickly.

Jane's face cleared.

"All right, dear, I 'm glad you don't mind; and, Edward, when you get the paper, I wish you 'd please brush your shoes a little — they look dirty."

Mrs. Garner frequently remarked to herself these days that she did n't see how a man could "leave things round so." She spent her time in one endless task of picking up after her husband. The poor man tried to whip himself into an orderly being; but his wife's lofty standard of precision was in the dim and distant unattainable for him.

She had one particular spot on the cloth for the salt, and another for the sugar, and she utterly refused to allow the vinegar and the pepper to be changed from their regular or-

bits in the revolving caster. A chair out of place brought a look of real distress to her countenance, and tracks on her clean kitchen floor brought tears to her eyes.

One day Ned, going quietly up to the bedroom, found his wife sitting on the floor surrounded by the five drawers of his chiffonier.

Her face expressed weary despair as she gazed at the confusion around her. She did not see her husband standing in the door, and he watched her for some time as she tried to bring possible order out of impossible chaos; then he turned and went softly downstairs.

That night he told her he was going West on business, and that he would leave the next morning. His kiss at parting was a tender one, and after he had reached the door, he came back and leaned over her low chair again. "Good-bye, little pardner. I'll — I'll write ye by-m-by."

Jane rose early the next morning and swept the house from garret to cellar. She sang blithely about her work, until it suddenly oc-

curred to her that her husband was gone and wives did not sing when dearly loved husbands had just left them; she went at once into the parlor and gazed remorsefully at the big empty chair which a little while before she had wheeled out of the sitting-room.

By and by she went upstairs to her room and pounded and patted and smoothed the feather bed and pillows into proper puffiness, and put away her gray bedroom slippers that lay, heels together and toes out, on the floor at the foot of the bed. There were no coats on the chair-backs nor shoes on the chair-seats, and the room was guiltless of masculine collars and ties; something within her thrilled with delight at the spotless order.

A few days later Jane received a letter:

Beggar's Creek, Col., Sept. 12, 1900.

DEAR LITTLE PARDNER: I'm back here in my old shack on the hills, Jane. I think mebbe it's just as well if I don't come East again yet awhile, dear. We belong to each other, I know, but somehow we don't seem to have found it out yet. My ways ain't your ways, and your ways ain't mine. I reckon I felt something like a broncho what's hitched into a buggy, and I was 'fraid I'd smash

things sure if I stayed in harness any longer. So I come away.

I reckon we was too old to learn new ways of living, Jane, but mebbe sometime we will be so old we won't mind things. Mebbe sometime you 'll want me. If you do, I 'll come, sure thing. I reckon it was all a mistake.

Always yours
NED GARNER

P. S. I forgot to say, dear, there is a lot of dust in the bank there in your name. Use it — use it all. There is more where that come from.
N. G.

P. S. again. As I wrote them letters — N — G —, I could n't help thinking they was me all over. N — G — no good. I never thought of it before, but it 's blamed true. NED

As Jane turned the last page of her letter, a man in a lonely cabin in the far West stretched himself comfortably in a worn "sleepy-hollow" chair, and carelessly tossed his newspaper on the disorderly table at his side. Then he leaned back contentedly, and watched the blue-gray smoke curling above his head as he pulled at his old, well-stained pipe.

The Angel of Peace and Billy

MISS CAREW, in the sumptuous hotel waiting-room, tapped her foot and glanced down the hall for the first glimpse of her expected guest. There was impatience but no eagerness in her eyes. To her mind it was quite disagreeable enough to miss connections and have to wait four hours for her train, without its being Christmas Day as well. It was Tom's fault, too. She decided that unhesitatingly. To be sure, her lover had nothing to do with her losing her train; but if she had not quarreled with him four days ago, she would have telegraphed him that she would be passing through New York and that he might escort her across the city to the station, in which case she would not now be in this very forlorn situation. As Miss Carew looked at it, therefore, Tom was to blame for the whole thing.

There came a hurried step down the hotel

corridor, and a moment later Miss Carew was looking into the blue eyes of a freckle-faced messenger-boy.

"The lady wan't there, miss," he observed cheerfully, "but there was another one. She give me this." And he held out a square white envelope.

As Miss Carew read the note she frowned; then she raised her head impatiently. The boy still stood by her side, motionless. Through the wide-flung dining-room doors down the hall he had caught a glimpse of swift-moving figures, bearing fascinating platters topped with fat silver covers, and something in his wistful eyes sent a quick throb of sympathy to Miss Carew's pulse. Almost instantly followed her decision.

"H'm-m—er—" she began. "Let me see—your name is—"

"Billy. Billy Renfrew, ma'am," returned the boy promptly.

"H'm," murmured Miss Carew again. "Very good. Then, Billy, I'd like to have you take dinner with me to-night."

"Dinner!" The boy fell back a step.

"Come, come," laughed Miss Carew softly. "You should say, 'Thank you; I'd be delighted, Miss Carew.'"

Billy frowned. Billy suspected he was being made fun of — the surest road to Billy's wrath.

"You see, it's this way," explained Miss Carew, smiling into the boy's stormy eyes. "I'm all alone. Even my maid, at the station, has met friends. Unfortunately we missed our train, and so I can't eat my Christmas dinner with my sister, away out in the country, as I had planned. I drove here and sent a message to a friend to meet me, but she is out of town. Surely you don't want me to eat my Christmas dinner alone, Billy?"

Billy wavered, but his eyes still held distrust.

"I really need you, too, Billy," went on Miss Carew smoothly. "A lady does n't like to enter a public dining-room all alone, you know. I need you for — escort."

A great light broke over Billy's face.

"You mean — " he cried; then Miss Carew almost laughed aloud, for the boy was bow-

ing low, his hand on his heart. "Thank ye; I'd be delighted, Miss Carew," he was saying pompously.

"There, Billy, that's better," exclaimed Miss Carew, trying to steady her voice. "Now suppose we go on to the dining-room."

"Gee whiz! ain't this great!" breathed Billy, as he looked about him a few moments later.

Miss Carew smiled and nodded listlessly. Already this thing she had done seemed to be hardly worth the while. It *was* Christmas, and she *had* quarreled with Tom; moreover, a distant dinner table was even now showing a vacant chair where she herself should have been. Then with an effort she roused herself.

"Well, Billy, what shall we have for dinner?" she asked.

"Say, I am hungry," confessed the boy. "What they got?"

"There's the bill of fare—look and see," smiled Miss Carew.

Billy's gaze dropped to the card, and his mouth fell open.

"Gee!" he cried delightedly. "All that?" Then his face changed. "Say, them figgers that come after can't mean the cost, ma'am — they're too big!"

"Never mind the figures, Billy," laughed Miss Carew. "Pick out all you want — the more the better."

Billy drew a long breath and fairly hugged himself. Here were turkey, oysters, chicken pie. Suddenly a new light came to his eyes. "Do ye mean it? Don't ye care about the cost?" he demanded, eagerly.

"Not a bit," assured Miss Carew.

Down went Billy's head again, his lips moving in swift calculation.

"Sixty — a dollar twenty — two — but, ma'am, it will come ter — ter two dollars an' ninety cents!" Billy's voice shook.

"Is that all?" returned Miss Carew, with an unconcern that made Billy's heart sing within him. "But you haven't said yet what you want."

Billy straightened up and lifted his chin.

"I'll take a piece of mince pie, please, an' the rest in cash," he said.

The waiter at Billy's side turned his back suddenly. But Billy did not notice that.

"You'll take — what?" demanded Miss Carew faintly.

"I want ter eat the pie," explained Billy, with some care; "an' as you was willin' ter buy the turkey an' scalloped oysters an' things, why, I thought mebbe you would n't mind payin' me instead of the hotel man, an' then I can get the Christmas things for the kids."

"But you — you said you were hungry," protested Miss Carew.

"Yes'm; that's why I'm gettin' the pie," returned Billy; "or else I'd take it all in cash for the Christmas things."

"Oh!" murmured Miss Carew faintly, as she turned with some little agitation to the ordering of her own dinner.

"And now," she began a little later, as they were waiting, "who is going to have all these Christmas things, please?"

"Why, the kids, of course — my fam'ly."

"Your family!"

"Well, there's Nellie and Toddles — they *are* mine; Bumper — he ain't, really. He be-

longs ter old Mike, an' it 's for him mostly that I want the Christmas truck, 'cause I can't let him out ter see the winders an' things."

"Oh, is he sick?"

"Nope. Hidin' him," returned Billy laconically.

"*Hiding* him!"

Billy turned quickly. His eyes blazed.

"Say, now, you would n't peach — but then, of course, you would n't want old Mike ter have him any more 'n I would," he broke off calmly. "He ain't really Mike's, anyhow. Mike 's a perfesh, you know, an' he used the kid ter draw trade."

"Billy!" gasped Miss Carew. "What in the world are you talking about?"

Billy frowned and stirred uneasily.

"Well, mebbe 't wan't none of my bizness," he acknowledged; "but I jest could n't stand it. Old Mike 's a beggar, ye see, though he purtends ter sell shoestrings, an' he was makin' a heap off 'n Bumper. Bumper ain't but five, an' he 's crooked in his legs, an' skinny. He was good for a dime any time from the stingiest man on the street. I used

ter see him lots, an' I sized up pretty well how things was goin'. Well, one day my chance come, an' I grabbed it. I grabbed Bumper, too, an' I've had him ever since."

"*You* have had him!" cried Miss Carew incredulously.

"Oh, 'course livin' with me ain't no picnic," defended Billy; "but the kid's better off than he was, anyhow. He gets 'most enough ter eat, an' no kicks."

Miss Carew choked and lifted a glass of water to her dry lips.

"But you're not alone, Billy? Where's your father — your mother?" she faltered.

"Never did remember mother, an' dad's doin' time — Sing Sing, ye know," explained Billy cheerfully. "Ye see, me an' Nellie brought up Toddles. Nellie's fifteen now. She works some, too, an' gets some cash ter help out. Toddles is ten, an' — "

Billy stopped suddenly. The waiter had come with the dinner. But as one after another the dishes of scalloped oysters, turkey, and steaming vegetables were placed upon the table, Billy's eyes grew wide and troubled.

"Oh, I say, ma'am, ye know mine wan't but the pie," he began anxiously.

"Of course," reassured Miss Carew; "and your pie is right there before you. The rest is *my* dinner," she added calmly, as if the vast array before her was her usual selection for a single meal. "However, Billy," she added, "someway I'm not so hungry, after all, and you may have to help me out with it."

Two minutes later she had the satisfaction of seeing the good things begin to disappear down the sturdy little throat opposite.

"Of course the cash balance will be yours, too, just the same," she remarked, after a time, in a businesslike tone, "for all you ordered was the pie."

"Gee! what a lot I can buy!" gurgled Billy between mouthfuls. "Ye see, I'd promised the kids sure they'd have somethin' come Christmas. But I hain't had a cent but what had ter go for rent or somethin'. I'd planned not ter go home ter-night, anyhow, till after Bumper was asleep. I knew he'd take on so if I didn't bring home a mite o' truck for Christmas."

"But you can't buy anything now before to-morrow," frowned Miss Carew. "The toy-shops won't be open." Suddenly her face lighted up. She glanced at her watch. "Billy," she cried under her breath, "they shall have a Christmas — and to-night, too! Come! We've just time before my train goes, but we have n't a minute to lose. Come!"

In the carriage that Miss Carew promptly ordered, Billy quite pinched himself to make sure he was awake. The first stop was at the Grand Central Station, where was waiting a trimly-dressed young woman with two large suit cases.

The next thing Billy knew, one of the suit cases lay open on the seat, and Miss Carew was thrusting into his hands all sorts of parcels tied with Christmas ribbons.

"They were for my sister's children," she explained breathlessly, "and they're just what we need." Then she snapped down the cover and turned to the young woman, whose eyes were dazed but respectful.

"Check the bags at the parcel window, Marie, then come with us. We are going to

play Santa Claus, and we have n't a minute to lose."

Twice more the carriage stopped — once for oranges and again for bonbons, cakes, and ice-cream; then it rattled down a narrow street to the number Billy gave as "home." By that time Billy himself was so excited that he could scarcely lead the way up the four flights of stairs.

On the threshold of the tiny room Miss Carew stopped in dismay. She had not supposed there was in all the world a place so bare, so cold, and so forlorn, with its smoky kerosene lamp. Before she could speak there came a shrill cry, and three children flung themselves against Billy's laden arms.

"Christmas! It 's Christmas!" shouted the three in one breath.

"Bet yer life it 's Christmas!" panted Billy; "an' this is *Mrs.* Santa Claus," he finished, with a low bow to Miss Carew.

They used a broom, with its handle thrust firmly through a broken chair, for a Christmas tree; and by the time they had festooned

its top with the red and green ribbons, and hung the round yellow oranges and the toys and bonbons all about it with varying lengths of string, it presented really a festive appearance. Down in the street the carriage waited, while upstairs a woman with sparkling eyes forgot everything but the delight of seeing pinched little faces glow with joy and hungry little teeth sink into cakes and candies. The gay dinner table, where was the vacant chair, beckoned no longer. Even Tom and the quarrel were banished into the oblivion of a forgotten past, and only the wondrous present seemed worth while. Suddenly she became aware that Billy was speaking, and of Bumper.

"Ye see, I took his case ter my doctor," he was saying; "an' he thinks mebbe he can fix him up pretty good."

"Your doctor?" asked Miss Carew abstractedly.

"Yes; Dr. Tom, ye know. There ain't any one anywhere like Dr. Tom!"

"Tom? Dr. Tom?" That Miss Carew had not quite forgotten was evidenced by the

way her wandering attention halted and challenged the "Tom."

"Oh, that ain't his name; it's 'Barrington,' but we—"

Five tense fingers clutched Billy's arm and cut the sentence short.

"'Barrington!'" cried Miss Carew softly, throwing a hurried glance toward the maid, who was dressing a doll for Toddles across the room. "'Barrington,' Billy—not Dr. Thomas Barrington?"

"Sure! That's the chap."

"But, Billy, where—how—when did you meet Dr. Barrington? Tell me everything—everything!"

Billy's eyes grew wide, but he obeyed the word of command instinctively.

"Why, I done errands for him first, off an' on; an' once, when I was 'most sick, he dosed me up good. An' when I got Bumper, I got ter talking about him, an' if you 'll believe it, the next thing I knew, down here trotted the doctor hisself."

"Yes, yes; go on," urged Miss Carew. This was so like Tom—*her* Tom! He was always

so kind! (Miss Carew had forgotten all about the quarrel.)

"Why, nothin', only he comes reg'lar now; an' there's others, ye know, down here that he's found, an' he helps them, too,—heaps of 'em."

Miss Carew drew a long breath; then from somewhere came the clear tones of a clock striking nine.

"Marie—my train!" she cried, springing to her feet. "Why, it went ten minutes ago!"

Down in the street a little later the carriage door banged shut after a crisp "The Grand Central—and hurry, please!" from an agitated little woman whose face was yet strangely aglow with joy. Still later the same little woman turned away from one of the narrow windows in the great station.

"There's not another train that we can take until eleven o'clock, Marie," she was saying, half laughing, half crying. "But I fancy if we stay right here we won't lose that!"

At ten o'clock a physician in an uptown office was summoned to his telephone.

"Tom, you dear!" called an eager but tremulous voice. "Why didn't you tell me about Billy and that dear little Bumper? It was so like you — but you might have told *me!* . . . Where am I? At the Grand Central. . . . Yes, I know you're surprised. But I lost my train. I was going to May's. I didn't decide to go, anyway, until the last minute, else I should have been there yesterday. . . . No, no, you can't come down here, Tom. I'm off at eleven, anyway, and I've telegraphed them to meet me. Marie is with me, and I'm all right. I've had the loveliest experience! I can't tell you now, but I just had to ring you up and tell you how splendid I think it is about Billy. And, Tom, we won't ever lose track of them, will we? And when we're married and I come here to live, we'll do all sorts of fine things for them. Oh, Tom, I could just — but, then, of course I mustn't through the 'phone. Good-bye. I'll write to-morrow, sure!"

And not until she hung up the receiver did Miss Carew suddenly remember that she was supposed to be quarreling with Tom.

The Second Fiddle

AT the first sound of the step on the stone walk below, Kate Denny sprang to her feet. A delicate flush came to her cheeks and a new light to her eyes. She listened, standing motionless, until the whir of the electric bell stirred her into life.

Hurriedly she crossed the room to her mirror, and patted with shaking fingers the already smooth waves of her pale yellow hair. From the lace at her throat she tore the blue bow hastily, substituting a pink one — only to replace it almost at once with the blue. Her gown at back and waist and sleeves she touched tentatively with her still shaking fingers; then, when plainly nothing else could be done to make perfection more perfect, she turned and waited, her expectant eyes on the closed door leading from her chamber to the hall.

Two, three, five minutes passed. The sub-

dued confusion of an entrance and the sound of voices had floated up from the hall below, but all was silent now. Three more minutes Kate Denny waited. Surprise, doubt, and a frightened questioning came in turn to her eyes; then resolution, as she softly crossed the room and opened the door.

A light laugh floated up the stairway, and a deeper note answered. The girl drew back, half closing the door.

Then it was true. He had come, and she had not been summoned to go down. Edith was there, however,—that light laugh had been hers. . . . So it was to be the old story over again. If Edith wanted it, she must have it, whether it were a jam tart or the exclusive attention of an evening caller.

Always it had been like that; and always she, Kate, had taken the subordinate place, together with the smaller tart, the less-fresh hair ribbon, the chicken wings to eat, and the iron kettles to wash. It had been the same when the "party age" arrived, and the boys had first begun to cast admiring eyes in their direction. Always, Edith walked off with

curly-headed Roy, leaving freckle-nosed Jimmy to Kate — and that, too, sometimes when Kate had been very sure that it was Roy's eyes, and not Jimmy's, that had been turned the more ardently in her own direction. And now —

Resolutely Kate Denny opened the door wider and took one step into the hall.

Well, why not? That was John Kennison down there. He had come to see her. He had hinted that he might be there that evening. Many times, of late, he had sought her out and talked to her — and every one knew how shy he usually was with women. And now —

Irresolutely the girl still stood debating the matter, when the twang of a violin string came from the room below and seemed to end all hesitation. With swift steps and heightened color, Kate Denny tripped down the stairs and entered the brightly lighted living-room. John Kennison rose at once, an almost boyish eagerness in his glance. Edith Denny turned slowly. Her eyes carried a barely perceptible annoyance.

"Oh, here's Kate," she said. "You're just in time, Kate, to turn the music."

John Kennison played first violin in a large city orchestra. He stood now close to the piano, his instrument in his hand, and his eyes longingly fixed on Kate Denny.

"It's the concerto. I was going to try it a bit," he began eagerly. "You know I brought the piano score last week. You said you'd—"

"Yes, it's right here, Mr. Kennison," interrupted Edith, brightly. "And we'd love to play it with you. Kate shall turn the leaves while I play. Come, Kate."

For one brief instant Kate almost rebelled. John Kennison had asked her to practice that score, and she had practiced it for hours at a time until now it was at her finger tips; yet she was expected to stand patiently by and turn the leaves for Edith—Edith, who had "run through" the thing once or twice, and who would stumble wretchedly over every other note.

"But, Edith," hesitated Kate, "don't you think it would be better if I—"

"Nonsense! of course you can turn the music, Kate," laughed her sister, airily. "Don't be so timid! Come." And Kate went — so potent is the influence of an uninterrupted training of smaller tarts and chicken wings.

It was not a success — the playing of that concerto. From start to finish it was an agitated scramble on the part of each player to find and keep step with the other. At its conclusion Edith laughed hysterically, Kate bit her lips in open confusion, and John Kennison reached for his handkerchief to wipe the perspiration from his face.

A moment later Edith suggested that they try a popular love song to which she knew the accompaniment; and with a fervent "Yes, do, if you please!" the man raised his violin to position.

For half an hour then Kate sat in a corner and listened to ragtime, and to the brilliant sallies of her sister Edith, who was entertaining John Kennison. A little later, cake was brought in — cake that Edith said she had made; and at the words Kate thought of the

kitchen that morning with Edith, dainty in a fresh frock, standing at the shelf, stirring gingerly at a concoction, not one ingredient of which had been put in without minute instructions from the elder sister, who had buttered the tin, beaten the eggs, sifted the flour, measured the milk, seeded the raisins, cracked the nuts, and who would, of course, frost the cake, and wash all the dishes afterward; and who sat now trying to choke down a piece of the cake — that Edith had made!

After the cake had been eaten and duly praised, there was more music, then John Kennison rose to go home. He said good-bye, and looked at Kate longingly; but before she could answer, Edith interposed a merry question; and it was Edith who went with him to the door, and who asked him to come again.

In her own room that night Kate Denny confronted the thing squarely. Behind set teeth she said:

"I will not give up John Kennison. Edith shall not have him — to play with and toss aside! No!"

Then, alone, in the dark, she blushed a

shamed red, and began to lash herself with scorn.

Had she, indeed, fallen so low as to be ready to quarrel over a man, as a dog would fight for a bone? Doubtless, anyway, John Kennison preferred Edith. He had seemed contented enough playing ragtime that evening. Surely, against his will, she, Kate Denny, would not wish to hold any man. Of course, if he preferred Edith—

A vision of two dark eyes rose before her and stayed the thought half expressed. Unflinchingly then she faced the facts as they were.

It was merely another case of the smaller tart; only Edith was older now, and the object of her fancy was a man, not a tart. As for herself, she, the elder sister, would be expected to step back cheerfully, out of sight, of course. Had it not always been so?

First, years ago in the nursery. Baby Edith was younger. She was her little sister. Always Baby Edith should have the biggest blocks and the prettiest toys. Not at once had Kate learned this, to be sure, and not

IT WAS EDITH WHO WENT WITH HIM TO THE DOOR

without sundry protestations in the shape of tempestuous wails and rebellious poutings. But she had learned it, and none too soon; for in swift succession there had followed the smaller tart, the less-fresh hair ribbon, the chicken wings to eat, and the iron kettles to wash, to say nothing of the freckle-nosed Jimmy.

Nor was this all. Looking at the subject in the light of this new determination that had come to her, Kate Denny saw more clearly than ever the subordinate rôle she had played in the household. Always was she seeding raisins for other people's cake-baking, and turning the music for other people's piano-playing; and fiercely now she declared to herself that both the cake and the music would be better if she had the entire handling of them.

After all, was there not such a thing as too much self-sacrifice, too continual self-repression? A certain amount, of course, was beautiful, virtuous, and altogether commendable; but might there not come a point where they became actually a fosterer of other people's selfishness, and a sin against one's own indi-

viduality? As if a perpetual seeder of raisins and eater of chicken wings could live a full, free life — a life that really brought out the best within one's self and within one's fellow men! Indeed, no! And there should be a change — a right-about face. She would see to it that there was. With sweet, gentle, yet firm dignity, she would take her rightful place.

And with this thought in mind, Kate Denny rose to her feet, prepared herself for bed, and then determinedly raised her window before opening the connecting door leading to her sister's room.

As expected, she did not have long to wait.

"Kate!" called her sister.

"Yes, Edith."

"Where's all that wind coming from?"

"From my window, perhaps; it's open."

"Open! Why, Kate Denny, you never have your window open!"

"I know I don't; but I thought I would to-night. I wanted the air."

"But it's so cold! I'm half frozen. Do you want me to catch my death of cold?"

"Why, no, of — of course not," murmured Kate. Involuntarily she started to get out of bed; then suddenly she fell back. With stern resolution she wet her dry lips and said, "If you're cold, Edith, why don't you pull up another blanket?"

"'Cold!' 'Another blanket!' Why, Kate, what are you thinking of, when you know how I hate a lot of stuffy clothes over me! I never knew you to act like this! Well, if you won't shut it, I shall — that's all!" And the swift patter of bare feet and the determined bang of the window sash told that Edith had made good her word. "There!" exclaimed an aggrievedly triumphant voice, as the patter retreated through the open doorway.

On the bed Kate Denny made one more effort to rise — to catch the fleeting "sweet, gentle, yet firm dignity" of her promise to herself; then wearily she fell back.

"After all, it'll be easier to begin to-morrow in daylight when — when I'm up and dressed," she told herself. "Besides, there won't be anything so hard as that window is, to — assert my rights about."

"To-morrow," however, proved that dignity had neither to do with daylight nor being dressed, and that whether it were an open window or a proffered invitation about which one wished to assert one's self, there was no variation in the difficulty of doing it. Struggle as she did all day, by night Kate Denny was forced to own that she was not one whit nearer the "full, free life" that was to bring out the best within herself and within her fellow men.

She had arisen early and started breakfast (in spite of it being Edith's week to perform that duty). She had washed the dishes while Edith went to market, because Edith liked to go to market—when it was pleasant. When it rained, Kate herself went. As usual, she had tidied the kitchen and the bathroom, leaving the lighter dusting to Edith and her mother who preferred that kind. As usual, too, at luncheon, she had given the golden-brown crusts of her rolls to Edith, not because she herself did not like golden-brown crusts, but because Edith always wanted them. To be sure, Kate had tried to keep them herself to-

day; but Edith reached for them as a matter of course — and got them.

At two o'clock John Kennison came with the invitation to go sleighing. Kate was dressing, and Edith had gone to the door. Kate could hear now what her sister had called out merrily, saucily:

"Oh, she's busy, Mr. Kennison; but I'll go. I'll be right out."

Kate had run then swiftly into the upper hall, and had uttered some sort of protest. But Edith had only laughed and answered scornfully:

"Why, Kate, you were busy — you know you were! You were dressing. Surely, you don't want me to change now, and — and tell him you won't let me go, do you?"

Kate had murmured a faint "No, of course not," and had crept back, ashamed, into her own room. And not until she had heard the sleigh-bells go jingling down the road did she remember that "sweet, gentle, yet firm dignity" that was to have been hers that day.

It was of this, all this, that Kate was thinking now, as she dressed for the concert that

evening. The concert was to be a grand affair in town, given by John Kennison's orchestra. John Kennison was only one of the eight first violins in that orchestra, but to the Dennys the "Philharmonic" was always "John Kennison's orchestra," and as such its concerts were enthusiastically welcomed. To-night, however, there was no animation, no joy in Kate Denny's face as she dressed herself; nor did even the anticipatory rustle and hum of the concert room itself bring an answering flash or sparkle as she waited for the first number on the programme.

This was her mood when a chance conversation between two men in front of her aroused a mild sort of interest.

"Who is that long-haired, dreamy-eyed creature caressing his fiddle as if it were the dear child of his heart?" asked one man of the other.

Almost unconsciously Kate Denny turned her head to catch the reply. She, too, had often idly wondered about that particular dreamy-eyed violinist.

"That? Oh, that's Bronoffsky."

"Queer-looking chap! Good player?"

"Hm-m — well, yes, he is. Still — he's only a second fiddle up there, you know. He plays second violin." There was a moment's pause, then, half musingly, the voice went on: "Do you know, it's rather funny about that fellow, Bronoffsky. He is possessed and consumed by one mad ambition; he wants to lead, direct, — be a conductor, you know."

"Well, why doesn't he?"

"Bronoffsky lead? Jove! man, he couldn't! Bronoffsky's a dreamer, not a doer. He can play, sure — second fiddle. But he hasn't the audience sense; he doesn't know how to handle men. He doesn't know how to hold thirty, forty, fifty instruments at the tip of a little black stick. All his life he's been controlled, not in control. All his life he's done another's will, not his own. Great Scott! man, Bronoffsky is — is just what you see, a first-rate second fiddle!"

There was a burst of applause — the leader of the Philharmonic had appeared on the platform. A moment later came the electric hush that follows the tap of the conductor's

baton; then sounded a long, quivering note from the first violins.

But all this Kate Denny neither saw nor heard. Behind the two men who had talked of Bronoffsky she sat tense and motionless, her eyes staring straight ahead, her ears hearing only the words that had just been spoken:

"All his life he's been controlled, not in control. All his life he's done another's will, not his own. . . . Bronoffsky is — is just what you see, a first-rate second fiddle!"

So that was all she was, or could ever hope to be — a second fiddle. All her life she had been controlled, not in control. All her life she had done another's will, not her own. And now she, like Bronoffsky, had hoped to lead. As if she could! — she, the perpetual turner of leaves for other people's music, the continual seeder of raisins for other people's cake!

Suddenly, now, Kate Denny became conscious of the music from the platform. It had dropped to pianissimo, yet clearly, sweetly, the melody still ran through it like a silver thread. Fainter and yet more faint it grew,

until only an airy, swaying cobweb of sound floated from the leader's baton.

There was a moment's breathless hush, then deafening applause. In her seat Kate Denny relaxed suddenly. With the strains of that perfect music still in her ears, she declared to herself that only selfishness, pure selfishness, had made her rebel at getting Edith's breakfast, washing Edith's dishes, and eating Edith's biscuit-centers; and only selfishness again had grudged Edith the sleigh-ride with John Kennison that afternoon. This was not, indeed, exactly a new course of reasoning for Kate Denny to pursue. She had argued along the same lines before. But to-night, especially, still under the sway of those marvelously blended harmonies, she could see nothing but well-deserved failure for any second fiddle who attempted to assert his own individuality. In pursuance of this policy Kate Denny went to bed that night with the windows in her bedroom fast closed.

One by one the days came and went. To Edith and her mother they seemed not unlike many other days long passed. To Kate Denny

they were hardly dissimilar, except, perhaps, for the growing frequency of John Kennison's visits. Not that she herself saw so much of him, but that she knew he was there, and that his presence began to mean so much to her that she was frightened.

Very conscientiously these days Kate Denny was leaving to Edith the crisp brown of the biscuits, and the exclusive attentions of John Kennison — both of which Edith claimed as her right, anyway. There were times, to be sure, when Kate almost rebelled; when she declared to herself that it was not strange, or unwomanly, or even selfish that she should not like always to be doing the drudgery, or always to be giving up her will about every little matter, or always to be handing over to another woman the flowers, drives, calls, and candy that seemed originally intended for herself. But invariably, even though inwardly she did rebel, outwardly she was still the self-sacrificing, self-effacing sister.

As it chanced, it was after a day of this inward rebellion that Kate Denny went once again with her family to a concert by the Phil-

harmonic. There was the same anticipatory hum and stir in the audience, but on the stage — on the stage, even Kate could see that something unusual had happened, or was about to happen. One by one the musicians were taking their places, but not in the quiet, orderly way that was customary. They were plainly hurried, nervous, excited. One stumbled against a music-rack, and another dropped his bow to the floor. Some talked earnestly together; others sat silently apart, an odd look almost like disdain on their faces. Bronoffsky, for whom Kate looked at once, was nowhere to be seen. She was wondering at this, when unexpectedly John Kennison appeared in the aisle by her seat.

"I came down a minute to tell you," he began excitedly in a low voice. "Last night Rossi — the leader, you know — was thrown out of his auto and hurt rather badly. Kepple, the concert master, was with him, and he was knocked out, too, for to-night. And what do you think? — Rossi sent word that Bronoffsky — *Bronoffsky* should conduct to-night!"

"Who's Bron — Bron — what's his name?"

demanded Edith, pettishly. And Kate, to whom John Kennison's words had been addressed, for once rejoiced in her sister's interposition, so oddly stirred was she herself at John Kennison's words.

"Why, he's one of the second violins, *second violins*," repeated Kennison, "tall, long-haired chap with big black eyes. You'll remember when you see him. I must go, but I wanted to tell you," hurried the man, turning again to Kate, "something's going to happen, but just what, I don't know. He's been putting us through our paces all the morning, and — well, you'll see," flung back Kennison as he hurried away.

Five minutes later the orchestra were all in their places; then from the wings stepped a tall, dark-haired man, and Kate Denny's heart gave a heavy, suffocating throb. A patter of hand-clapping greeted the man's appearance, but almost instantly it died into silence — the claps had been intended for Rossi — and this man was not Rossi. Kate Denny, watching him with suspended breath, wondered if he cared. She was conscious of

an odd resentment against her fellow auditors. If she had dared she would have started a second clap herself, a fierce, relentless clap, so eager was she suddenly that this man should succeed.

The man himself did not look as if he cared, or as if he even heard. With head and shoulders erect he was making for the stand. His face was white, and his jaw firm-set; but there was that in his eyes that caused the girl to glow suddenly as with hidden fire. For a tense instant Bronoffsky, motionless upon his stand, faced his orchestra; then slowly he raised his baton.

True to John Kennison's prophecy, something did happen that evening. The orchestra knew that never before had they played as they were playing now — with such passion, such power, such a oneness of purpose. Never before from the tip of that little black stick had come such a persuasive control, such seductive leadership, such enthralling magnetism, drawing them on and on to the perfect end.

The audience knew only that never before

had they heard forty instruments sound so exactly as one. Never before had they been so lifted out of themselves. They expressed their appreciation in a burst of applause that swept them irresistibly to their feet, and that forced their new idol to face them again and again with low bows of acknowledgment.

The critics — between the numbers the critics talked enthusiastically of the new leader who had that night been born. From their lips dropped learned phrases: He did not overdrive his orchestra; he sought no undue din of brass and drum; he was careful of the quality as well as the quantity of tone; he had balance, poise, power; he ordered the pace of his music judiciously, and he moulded its phrases with a masterly hand. Like a general he marshaled his forces, and never once did they escape his guiding hand — all this said the critics.

And yet — neither orchestra nor audience nor learned critics were quite so much moved as was a certain young woman in an orchestra chair nine rows from the front. Her head was erect, her eyes were shining like stars,

and her mouth was curved in a smile that some way seemed to carry an elation all out of proportion to any cause. For, had you asked her, she would have said that it was all because of one Leon Bronoffsky, second violinist, who that night had led the orchestra.

For Edith Denny that evening there came two surprises. One surprise was when she found herself unaccountably walking out of the concert hall with her mother, while ahead Kate and John Kennison walked together.

The second surprise came later, when Kate, nearly ready for bed, appeared at the connecting door between their rooms.

"Edith," began Kate cheerfully, "I'm going to close this door to-night. I want my window open, and you don't, you know; so if I close the door we'll both be satisfied. Good-night." And she shut the door.

For one amazed instant Edith stood and stared at the closed door; then she darted forward, her hand reaching for the knob.

"Why, Kate, what are you thinking of, when you know I never sleep without that door open," she cried. The next moment she

fell back weakly — the door was locked. "Why, Kate!"

There was no answer, but a moment later there came from Kate's room a little tremulous melody that sounded for all the world like the whistle of a small boy who is trying to keep up his courage in the dark.

Long after Edith had gone petulantly to bed, the melody still haunted her, but she could not place it, until suddenly she recollected it was the opening phrase of the overture that the orchestra had played first that night under the new leader's directing.

A Quarantined Quarrel

THE airy indifference of the girl's manner and the stilted pomposity of the man's words made the quarrel a comedy; the ache in the girl's heart and the choke in the man's throat made it a tragedy.

Rainsford, his head high, thrust the discarded diamond into his pocket and strode into the hall. It was at that moment that the fussy little doctor from the village came down the stairway.

"There is no doubt, madam," he was saying to Mrs. Kenton, who was close behind him. "It is a well-developed case of diphtheria and the very greatest caution is necessary."

The man in the hall below caught up his hat and stalked to the outer door.

"Here, here, Mr. Rainsford," called the doctor, agitatedly, "you must n't do that!"

Rainsford was not a patient man and he had been sorely tried during the last hour.

"Must n't do what?" he demanded, throwing wide the door.

"You must n't go out, to be sure."

"Must n't — go — out!" returned Rainsford, stupidly.

"Certainly not," said the doctor with a pompous uptilting of his chin. "My dear sir, you are quarantined."

"Quarantined!"

"Yes, sir — quarantined," reiterated the doctor. "There is a case of diphtheria upstairs and not a soul can leave this house until — until I give permission."

At Rainsford's dismayed ejaculation, Mrs. Kenton came quickly forward.

"My dear boy," she soothed, "don't let it fret you for a moment. We shall be delighted to have you with us. Just think, you will be a regular godsend to us through all these lonely days ahead; and Dorothy — it will be so nice for Dorothy. She would have been left so much to herself, you see, for of course Mr. Kenton will take more or less of my time."

"But, Mrs. Kenton, I can't — there are reasons why I —"

Rainsford paused irresolutely.

"Nonsense — not a word! Come — run into the other room to Dorothy," urged Mrs. Kenton, turning him about and motioning toward the living-room door. "I want to ask the doctor some questions."

Hardly conscious of voluntary movement, Rainsford found himself a moment later facing Miss Dorothy Kenton, who sat, limp and silent, upon the living-room sofa.

"You heard?" he asked.

She nodded her head.

"Pleasant prospect — for you," he observed.

"But what — what are we going to do?" she faltered.

His hands executed an expressive semicircle.

"But it — it's ridiculous," she continued, with some heat. "The idea of our being shut up in the same house in this absurd fashion now; if it had been before, why — " she stopped, her cheeks crimsoning.

For some unaccountable reason his spirits rose.

"Can't help it — it's a case of quarantine," he rejoined, with a sonorous imitation of the doctor's pompous accents.

"But we must help it. You can't stay here, of course, now!"

"You are hospitable," he murmured gently.

The color swept across her face until even her forehead was pink. "I beg your pardon," she began stiffly. "Of course, as hostess I should have spoken quite differently."

"Oh, don't trouble yourself," he replied; "your mother has already given me the most cordial of welcomes."

At that moment Mrs. Kenton came into the room.

"Well, well, children, this is an experience, is n't it?" she exclaimed. "I don't suppose it will trouble you much, though," she went on with a faint smile.

"What did the doctor say of father?" interposed Dorothy, with feverish eagerness.

Mrs. Kenton's face lengthened. "Well, it's diphtheria — and that's bad; still, he says it's a light case. We are fortunate in having Miss Merriman — she's a fine nurse.

But I do wish Dr. Kane were here. We've sent for him, however, and if he's in the city he'll surely come. This is the first time anything like this has ever happened when we've taken a cottage at one of these summer places."

"And my being thrust upon you in this absurd fashion is anything but pleasant for you," asserted Rainsford.

"My dear boy," remonstrated Mrs. Kenton, "we're delighted! Of course I shall have to be with Mark more or less and I fear you two will be left pretty much to your own devices, but I presume—"

"Er—mother," Dorothy broke in hastily, "I can help, you know."

"There's not a thing for you to do, dear, except to make it as pleasant as possible for our captive here. There! Here I am chatting when I should be making arrangements for Mr. Rainsford's comfort. Your room will be at your disposal right away, Jack," she smiled over her shoulder as she went out the door.

For a moment there was an uncomfortable silence, then Rainsford jerked himself to his feet.

"Dorothy, dear, surely under the circumstances you—"

"Mr. Rainsford," interposed a clear voice, "under the circumstances I certainly shall endeavor to do my duty as hostess; but I must insist that beyond that the intercourse does not extend. If you will excuse me I will see if your room is ready," and she arose and swept through the door.

The house was very quiet when Rainsford came downstairs the next morning. He fingered the books on the center table, picked up a magazine, dropped it, then wandered out to the veranda, which extended around three sides of the house.

"Well, by Jove," he muttered wrathfully, marching to and fro, "I'll stand this thing just one hour longer until I see Mrs. Kenton, then—I'll run for it!"

His feet were brought to an abrupt stop at the extreme end of the veranda where an open door led apparently into the kitchen. Kneeling before the stove was Miss Kenton.

"Since when have you been a fire-worshiper?" he asked.

Miss Kenton laughed merrily.

"Jack, what's the matter with this stove? I've opened all the slides and doors I can find, but—" she stopped suddenly, her cheeks scarlet. "It is going very nicely now, Mr. Rainsford; you need n't trouble," she said frigidly.

Again Rainsford's spirits unaccountably rose. He stepped into the room and peered into the grate where three charred sticks smoked with occasional spits of fire. "This might make a slight difference," he observed gravely, reaching up and turning the damper in the stovepipe. A minute later, with the aid of some small sticks he had the fire burning briskly. After being assured that the sick man was no worse, Rainsford said:

"Might I inquire—without exceeding the limits of our prescribed fellowship—if this is your usual morning pastime?"

Miss Kenton's eyes flashed and her chin rose perceptibly. "The cook has gone," she replied with some dignity.

"Gone!"

"Yes; ran away in the night—afraid."

"And Nora?"

"Gone!"

Rainsford gave a sharp ejaculation. "The miserable cowards — to leave you like this! What are you going to do?"

"Do? I am going to get breakfast — perhaps you'll run now," she finished, something very like a twinkle in her eyes.

"You couldn't hire me to!" he returned, with a promptness that gave no hint of his recent determination quite to the contrary; then he added, "I can make fine coffee, Dorothy, and —"

"I can get along very nicely by myself, Mr. Rainsford," interposed Miss Kenton, with sudden hauteur.

"Oh — transgressed, that time, didn't I?" murmured Rainsford, cheerfully, with uplifted eyebrows, as he picked up the basket and went out into the shed for more wood. Dorothy looked after him for a helpless moment, turned, and went into the pantry. She was standing irresolutely before an empty bread jar when he came back and peeped in at the door.

"Might make a corn cake," he suggested.

"Why, I've forgotten — I did know how once — but there's a rule — it must be somewhere," she replied disconnectedly, poking inquiring fingers into the drawer at her left.

"I know how," announced Rainsford, airily; "still, I'd have to have mother's old dish with the two cracks and a nick in it to tell me how to measure the things," he added, with a mischievous glance.

Miss Kenton's back stiffened.

"I learned at cooking school, of course," she began with some dignity; "but I have not practiced any of the things lately, only rabbits and creamed things and a cake now and then — Oh, here's the book!" she finished.

When Miss Kenton came into the kitchen a minute later she found an array of raw beefsteak, cold potatoes, and a canteloupe on the table.

"Found 'em in the refrigerator," chuckled Rainsford. "I'll broil the meat when the time comes — done it lots of times in camp; I know how to fix the potatoes in great shape, too," he added.

"Oh, that's fine!" cried Dorothy, softly, almost clapping her hands; but the tips of her fingers had scarcely come together before the smile left her lips and eyes. "I fear you are giving yourself altogether too much trouble, Mr. Rainsford," she said, in quite another voice.

"Trouble? Not at all—not at all!" disclaimed Rainsford, cutting the melon into nicely calculated portions. Miss Kenton was silent for a moment, then she said shortly:

"The corn meal is out—I can't make a corn cake."

"Hm-m—what's the matter with doughnuts? I'll fry 'em."

Miss Kenton looked at him doubtingly. "Well, I might try," she acquiesced finally, turning back into the pantry.

When the round, doughy things were ready, Rainsford, armed with a huge fork, presented himself at the stove.

"I'm here," he announced.

"Very well, you may fry them while I fix another plateful," she said, somewhat ungraciously. She found him a few minutes later

dubiously eying a half-dozen hard brown rings which were draining on a plate.

"Why, what ails them?" she cried.

He shook his head.

"They — they're hard as rocks and flat as pancakes!" she gasped, picking one up and rapping it on the table.

"Maybe you didn't put any — any yeast in them," he hazarded.

"Yeast!" she scoffed, "they are not made with yeast!"

"Perhaps you didn't mix them right."

"I made them straight according to rule," she returned with dignity. "It must have been your frying."

"Oh, but it couldn't have been," he demurred. "I never left them alone a minute. I flopped them over and over all the time."

A peal of laughter interrupted him.

"Oh — oh — you don't mean to say that you stood there and turned those poor things over every second!" she cried, as soon as she could speak. "No wonder their spirits couldn't rise — and just look at your fat! It's so hot it burned up what little life there was left!"

"Dear me, children, what a good time you are having!" called Mrs. Kenton from the doorway. "When one is young and in love one can find enjoyment anywhere."

Dorothy choked into instant gravity, while Rainsford made a low bow.

"I am in disgrace, madam," he said meekly. "I am guilty of too devoted an attendance upon doughnuts and — er —"

"Yes, you are," interrupted Dorothy severely, vanishing into the pantry.

When the breakfast was finally upon the table that morning there was nothing to complain of in its cooking, and Mrs. Kenton remarked that the change in servants was quite to her advantage. "However," she added with a smile, "I have telephoned to the village to see if some one can't be sent down at once."

After breakfast the dishes were the cause of a brisk warfare as to how they should be taken care of. It ended in Dorothy, silent and stern, presiding over the washing of them, while Rainsford, amiable and inconsequentially whistling, drenched innumerable cloths with the wiping of them. They were scarcely

finished when a stout woman, capable and unafraid, arrived from the village and took possession of the kitchen.

At two o'clock a man from the hotel, in response to Rainsford's telephone message, brought a suitcase filled with the various articles he had sent for. The man laid the bag somewhat gingerly down on the extreme end of the walk and hurried away; then Rainsford went down and picked it up.

"How perfectly funny!" exclaimed Dorothy nervously, as he came back to the steps.

"It does seem queer," acknowledged Rainsford.

"Don't you two look contented!" called a merry voice, as three pretty girls stopped at the end of the walk. "How is Mr. Kenton, Dorothy, dear?"

"He is very comfortable," replied Miss Kenton with studied politeness.

"Aren't you awfully glad you happened to be making that call, Mr. Rainsford?" laughed the second young woman gleefully. "Some people always are lucky!" called the third as the trio turned away.

There was an ominous silence on the veranda.

"How absurdly idiotic some people can be," observed Dorothy, after a time.

"Very," agreed the man.

Dorothy looked at him sharply; then she sighed and fidgeted in her chair.

"I don't like this deception," she protested.

"No? Then why not tell."

She gave him a scornful glance.

"As if I could call out across the lawn to those girls, 'We aren't engaged any longer!'"

"Hm-m; well, there's your mother."

Miss Kenton frowned. "She has enough to trouble her now. As things are she'd be dreadfully distressed. I shall have to wait until father is better and you are gone."

"Oh!" murmured Rainsford.

There was a long silence; then Dorothy sprang to her feet. She was almost hysterical with the tension of the last few hours. Things had scarcely improved since the morning. Rainsford had grown quiet, grave, and scrupulously polite. He seldom spoke save to an-

swer questions, and then the very tones of his voice vibrated with a ceremonious obedience to the laws of their new relationship. It had been quite three hours, indeed, since Miss Kenton had experienced the pleasure of openly resenting either his word or his deed. She looked at him now through narrowing lids; then she walked the length of the veranda and back again, stopping at last exactly in front of him.

"As hostess, I feel it my duty to entertain you," she announced sweetly. "If you 'll look under the table on that shelf there you 'll find some games. Make your selection and we 'll play."

Dr. Kane arrived on the five o'clock train and went directly to the sick room. Fifteen minutes later Mrs. Kenton appeared on the veranda.

"Well, Jack, you are free," she said smilingly.

"Eh — what — how — " stammered Rainsford, growing white and red by turns; there was but one kind of freedom in his mind, and that he had already most unwillingly received

at the hands of Dorothy. He glanced at the girl now, but her face expressed only unalloyed joy.

"You mean the quarantine? It's over?" she asked eagerly.

Mrs. Kenton nodded. "Yes; that fussy little doctor was all wrong. It's not diphtheria at all and your father will be all right in a few days."

"How perfectly glorious!" cried Dorothy. "I never believed father was very sick. Now we'll go off—let's see, what shall we do—ride?"

Rainsford caught his breath. "Yes; or we might go on the lake," he said, in a voice that he tried to make diplomatically unconcerned.

"Or we could play golf!"

"Hm-m; or we've got just time to see the sunset from Peak's Hill," he further suggested, with a swift, sidelong glance at her face.

"Just the thing after being cramped up all day! I'll get into my walking skirt in no time." And she hurried through the hall door

after her mother. The next minute she was back again with a dismayed face.

"Why, I—I forgot!" she faltered.

"Forgot? Forgot what?" he asked smoothly.

"Why, our—our—that things were n't the same any longer."

"Oh, never mind a little thing like that," he rejoined, his easy manner giving no hint of his own inward quakings.

"But I—I was going to tell mother, and now—" she paused helplessly.

"Now—I really would n't do it," supplemented Rainsford. "You see, it will be hard to make her understand after what you said just now," he continued, taking a shining golden circlet from his pocket and fingering it nervously. "Had n't you better put this on, too, Dorothy?—she might notice it," he urged, a world of tender pleading in his eyes for all his matter-of-fact tones.

For a minute Dorothy hesitated. The vines were thick and the veranda very secluded, and Rainsford drew her very gently toward him.

"Well—perhaps," she murmured, holding

out a slim, sunburned finger upon which he eagerly slipped the ring. But before his lips could touch her own, she had broken away and was laughing at him from the door.

"Really, you know, you deserve some punishment!" she called softly, as she disappeared.

Rainsford drew a long breath.

"I—I'll make that blessed doctor 'best man'—I vow I will!" he said aloud.

A White Rose

THE man gathered up his papers and rose to his feet. He was alert, keen-eyed, and smiling. Across the table, his wife waited until the turn of the hall hid him from sight, then she fell back in her chair and closed her eyes.

A moment before she, too, had been alert, and smiling-eyed. Now, she languidly raised her hand, and pressed her fingers against the throbbing pulse at her temple.

Vaguely she wondered what was the matter; why she was so unstrung, as if some one had, with a turn of the hand, loosened every tension and left her limp and quivering like a harp whose strings sway soundlessly to every passing breath.

"There are a hammock and two cushions and a tinkling glass of lemonade waiting for you on the piazza," called a masculine voice cheerily through the open window.

Mrs. Payson laughed, and rose slowly to her feet.

"Good boy, Dickie! You knew just what I wanted, didn't you?" she said, a moment later, as he placed the cushions at her back. "I *am* tired."

He gave her a sharp glance, and dropped into a chair near her.

"I met Howard in the hall just now," he said inconsequentially, after a pause. "He looked ten years younger than he did when he came out from the city an hour ago."

Mrs. Payson smiled faintly.

"Yes, I know," she murmured. "He's like a different man after he's been here an hour or two."

Richard Maitland rose from his chair abruptly, and walked to the end of the veranda. After a moment, he came back and dropped into his old position. There was about him a singular air of mingled determination and constraint. But his voice was unconcerned.

"I met a fellow on the train last week coming down — Tom Gerry. Ever heard Howard speak of him?"

"Oh, yes, often. He was Howard's dearest friend at college, I believe."

"Yes. Curious chap, too — in some ways. Maybe Howard told you."

"No." Mrs. Payson was listless, almost indifferent; but Maitland did not seem to notice it.

"Well, he was. He was a brilliant chap, but oddly sensitive. He had a roommate that acted upon him like a sponge in a saucer of water — Tom being the saucer, you understand."

Mrs. Payson sat suddenly erect.

"A — roommate?" she stammered.

"Yes." Maitland's eyes were fixed on a small bit of paper in his hand as he talked. "Both the men were good debaters, and they had a fashion of thrashing things out together that was vastly entertaining to the rest of us. They were alike, yet different. Both were keen, witty, and enthusiastic; and both plunged unhesitatingly into the depths — but with this difference: the roommate came up rosy, refreshed, and smiling, while Tom — well, Tom we had to put to bed, like

as not, with a hot-water bottle and a whisky sling."

"But did Tom always — lose?"

"Lose? Not a bit of it. He was quite as apt to win out as the other one. But whether he lost or won, 'twas all the same — he was exhausted. The saucer was dry, you see; the sponge had absorbed it all — the vitality, the enthusiasm, almost the breath of life itself."

Mrs. Payson shuddered.

"And they were the best of friends, too," continued the other musingly. "The queer thing about it is that none of us saw where 'twas leading. You'd think we might have known, too, when we saw Tom's roommate completely fagged from some exam, perhaps, and then come out fresh as a baby from its bath, and all because he'd been having a bout with Tom. If he acted like a sponge on Tom, Tom acted on him like a glass of wine, an electric shock, a call to arms — anything that spurs and stimulates. You'd think we might have known what it all meant, but we didn't — till the end. It was too late, then."

"The end?" Mrs. Payson's voice was not quite steady.

"Yes. It was during the last year. Poor Tom went all to pieces, and flunked the whole thing — couldn't graduate. 'Most broke his heart, too. He thought his brain had really gone back on him."

"What happened?"

"Oh, he went to a sanitarium somewhere, and while the rest of us were eating class spreads and yelling ourselves hoarse between mouthfuls, he was eating his heart out and gritting his teeth with a nurse on each side of him and a bag of ice on his head. He told me *that* last week when I saw him."

"Did he ever know — why — how it happened?"

"I don't think so. I didn't know myself — till afterward. But I've been wondering since, if I could have known then, and warned him — done something to stop that continual sapping — "

A step sounded on the veranda floor and the screen door banged.

"Emily, dear, there's a point, after all, that

we skipped," began Howard Payson, a little fretfully. Then to his friend: "Too bad to interrupt your tête-à-tête, Dick; but you know Emily's my right-hand man." He laughed with a quick glance at his wife that brought the pleased red to her cheeks. "I could n't make a plea without Emily. Wait till you have a wife yourself, old chap, then you 'll see! Oh, you need n't go," he added, as Maitland rose to his feet and, with playful ceremony, bowed himself off.

Five minutes later, Maitland passed the veranda on his way to the stables, but the absorbed pair in the hammock and the big chair did not notice him. Mrs. Payson was speaking — eagerly, confidently, the weariness all gone from her manner. Payson was leaning forward, his face alight. Maitland said a single word under his breath, and strode rapidly toward the stables.

Emily Payson did not sleep well that night. Her head throbbed, and every nerve in her body seemed a quivering point of misery; but she no longer asked the reason. It had not even needed her inquiring "Howard, you were

Tom Gerry's roommate at college, were n't you?" that night to tell her the truth. She had known before that the two men were roommates, and that was why Maitland's story had possessed for her so terrible a significance.

Bit by bit she went over in her mind the story of her marriage. She had been so proud when Howard Payson sought her out — so pleased that the brilliant young lawyer should find so evident a pleasure in matching his wits against hers. She remembered, too, how, from the very first, he had possessed the faculty of drawing out the best that was in her.

It had been a quick and tempestuous wooing. For three years now she had been a wife, and she suddenly began to realize what those three years had meant to her — the sponge and the empty saucer. Of Payson's devotion there was no doubt; she knew that. He made no secret of his habit of going over every case with her, and openly declared that some of his keenest thrusts owed their sharpness to the friction of her wits.

As to herself, she knew that from the day of her marriage there had been one thought uppermost — Howard. But there had been no rest. She saw it now. For three years he had been absorbing, absorbing — never giving. And she was so tired. She had been tired so long, too. She remembered that it was with difficulty that she roused herself that afternoon when Howard began to talk to her. Perhaps — Suddenly Maitland's words came to her with stinging force: "Poor Tom went all to pieces, and flunked the whole thing." What if she — No, no; she must not! She *would* not be like that!

In the calm light of the morning Mrs. Payson decided what should be done. She was unstrung and nervous. She needed rest; and she would systematically go about the task of obtaining it. Howard should not see quite so much of her during the next few days. She would devote herself more assiduously to the entertainment of their guest. Dickie was a dear good boy, anyway; and it was his words that had warned her. He understood even better than she herself how things were, and

he was just the one to help her. And, forthwith, she said to Maitland after breakfast:

"We'll take our luncheon over to the island, Dickie, to-day; and we'll telephone the Fentons to take theirs, too. We'll make a picnic of it." She was gone, therefore, when her husband came out from the city at three o'clock that day.

This was but the first of many such days. Systematically and thoroughly, Emily Payson was seeking rest, relaxation. She was not always gone from home, to be sure, when her husband arrived; but she usually managed so to occupy herself with some friend or pastime that there was small chance for her husband to monopolize her attention. There were times, it is true, when she failed in this, and when her husband was quick to see his advantage. Then the old spell reasserted itself, and she found herself keyed once more to concert pitch, ready to respond to his every touch. It was after such a time that it was so comforting to find Maitland waiting for her with a pillow, a cooling drink, or a restful cup of tea, as the case demanded.

And how she reveled in them — those comforting ministrations! Sometimes it was nothing more than a steadying arm to guide her over a rough place in the road, or possibly a light jest that would bring a laugh and make her forget her weariness of mind; and sometimes it was only a silence that he did not break while she lay back in her chair with closed eyes. Whatever it was, it was just right. He was so restful — so wonderfully restful!

Then, one day, Emily Payson awoke, and it was so small a thing as a little white rose that opened her eyes.

She had been fondling it, and resting its cool petals against her cheek as she sat talking with Maitland on the veranda. Yet, when she arose to go into the house, she had dropped it unheedingly on the floor. Almost instantly she had returned for it, but she had reached only the door when she saw it — in Maitland's hands. He was pressing it to his lips with a look on his face that sent the blood in a burning tide to her own.

She could get no farther than the stairs in

the hall when she fell on the lowest step in a limp, shaking little heap, her hands over her eyes. It was not the rose, the man, or the look on the man's face that had sent her down in defeat. It was the blinding revelation that had come to her in that one moment at the door.

There were, she knew, despicable creatures so lost to all sense of honor that they could fall in love with a man not their husband; but that she should have become one of them! The thought was intolerable. And Dickie—poor Dickie!—must he suffer, too? What had she done, said, to bring this thing upon them? How had he dared—but he had not dared. Never in her presence had he been other than the good friend, loyal alike to herself and to Howard, ever on the lookout for her comfort.

Her comfort!

Emily Payson smiled scornfully. *Her comfort!* Was she one, then, to let a cup of tea and a sofa pillow tip the scales, with her honor a mere nothing on the other side? Where were her devotion to Howard, her pride in his achievements, her glorying in her own power

to help him? What if he was absorbing, exacting? It was her wit, her aid, that he absorbed and exacted; and, pray, who had a better right to what she had to give?

As for this other — this vile thing that had crept into her heart — it must be torn out by the roots. It should be as if it were not. And it was not, too. It could not be. She had mistaken her own heart — and his. And with a little choking cry Mrs. Payson rose to her feet, and stumbled upstairs to her own room.

When Howard Payson came home that night he found his wife awaiting him. He was glad — particularly so, for there was a little matter which he very much wished to talk over with her; and, of late, he had not seemed to see much of her. To-night she gave him all her attention; even after dinner they still talked, and it was fully nine o'clock before he joined Maitland and his cigar on the veranda. Mrs. Payson went upstairs then. She said she was tired and would go to bed.

It was a week later, and the night before Maitland's intended departure, that Payson

and his guest sat smoking in the den, a tower room remote from the confusion and intimacy of the rest of the house. Maitland had purposely suggested the den instead of the veranda for their after-dinner cigar. There had evidently been something on his mind, but he smoked in silence until his cigar was a mere stub. Then he spoke.

"I wonder if you know how near I came to eloping with your wife," he said.

Payson turned sharply, then subsided with an annoyed laugh.

"Great Scott, Dick, your jests are — peculiar, to say the least."

"'T was no jest."

"Wha-at?"

Maitland picked up another cigar, and eyed it attentively. Payson sprang to his feet.

"See here, Maitland, what in time do you mean?" he demanded. "This is no melodrama, nor penny-dreadful!"

"No; but it might have been both," retorted the other.

Payson sat down impotently. A gray pallor swept his face.

"Maitland, what do you mean? Surely, my wife—"

"No, no; never!" cut in Maitland sharply. "She does not know—she has never imagined that I—love her."

"Love her!" Once more Payson sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing; but before the steady gaze of the other he fell back in his chair. "Good God, Maitland, I don't know why I don't knock you down!" he muttered.

"You would do it in a penny-dreadful, or on the stage, I suppose," retorted Maitland; "but not here, in everyday life. I've got something to say, and I think you want to hear it."

"Well?" The tone was harsh and aggressive.

Maitland smiled a little sadly.

"See here, Payson, I'm not telling this for my own good, or my pleasure," he began slowly. "Maybe I ought not to say it, anyhow. I dare say ninety-nine men out of a hundred in my place wouldn't say it—but I'm the hundredth man, that's all. It seems to me that a little plain talk sometimes—saves

things. I'm going to try it, anyhow. Where is Mrs. Payson — to-night?"

Payson stirred restlessly, and threw a keen glance into the other's face.

"Why, you heard her; her head aches. She's gone to bed."

"And last night? And the night before?"

"Well, she — she's not very well lately."

"She certainly is not."

"What do you mean?"

"See here, Payson, when I came here I could see what perhaps you couldn't, being with her all the time as you are. But what I did see in Emily Payson's face dismayed me. Something was sapping her strength and vitality. What that something was, I didn't find out — right away. When I did, I set myself to counteracting that influence all I could. But it didn't amount to much, and for the last week it has amounted to nothing at all. It is back worse than ever. All is, you've got to stop it. If you don't — well, there won't be a reason for stopping much longer."

"Stop? Stop what? What do you mean?"

"Yourself. It is you who are sapping her life."

"I? Great Scott, man! I worship the ground Emily walks on, and you know it." Payson was on his feet, his eyes an angry challenge.

"Yes, I know. You worshiped Gerry, too — Tom Gerry, at college."

"Gerry! But what has Tom Gerry to do with — Emily?"

"Just this," said Maitland; and he told the story as he had told it to Emily Payson — the story of the sponge and the empty saucer.

Payson listened in growing horror. At the end, he threw out his hands in shocked protest.

"Maitland, you can't mean that I — I caused Tom's defeat!"

"Yes — though I didn't know it myself until now, when I saw Emily. It's another case of the same sort. Think it over — that's all. Watch her, and see if what I say is not true."

Payson grew white. He looked suddenly old and haggard.

"But I can't — I don't see — I never thought — " He stopped helplessly.

"Of course not," agreed Maitland. "That's exactly why I spoke. I thought it might set you — thinking."

"But what can I do? How can I prevent — " Again Payson stopped helplessly.

"That's your — problem."

Payson dropped into his chair, and sat for some time with his eyes on the dancing flames in the fireplace. Except for the burning log, there was no light in the room, though over in the corner a glowing jewel of fire told where Maitland still smoked.

It was a low voice from the doorway that startled both men into breathless attention.

"Howard, are you there?"

Mrs. Payson had pushed aside the portière, and stood now with the firelight bringing out flecks of gold in her hair, and lighting up her pale, flowerlike face. Against the crimson of the portière the long folds of her gown gleamed softly blue.

"Yes, dear." Payson rose hurriedly, and advanced to meet her.

"I could n't sleep, so I came up here. I got to thinking. You know, to-night we were talking about that — "

"But you must n't, sweetheart," interposed Payson, in a voice that shook a little. "As if that were the way to drive away a headache! Come, dearie!" And he turned her gently about with his encircling arm. The next moment the crimson portière had fallen into place behind them.

To Maitland, alone in his shadowy corner, there floated upward, a moment later, a gleeful, silvery laugh, joyous and care free, like that of a child. For a long minute he sat motionless; then, very slowly, he drew out his pocketbook and took from an inner compartment a crushed, faintly odorous white rose.

"It would be just as well, I suppose," he said softly, with the rose against his lips, "if I did n't keep — this."

There followed a flash, and a spurt of flame; then, on the burning log, there lay a tiny, curling heap of filmy gray.

The Squaring of Mr. Jack

WITH neat celerity Miss B. put the tiny rooms in order, and then went out into the store to "open up." It was seven o'clock, and Hayden's Notion Store always opened at seven.

As usual this morning, Miss B. left the outer door wide open while she removed the dust-cloth from the counter, and patted into precision the cards of hooks-and-eyes in their orderly rows of boxes. The act was symbolical of her whole life — always had Miss B. patted into precision any irregular hopes, ambitions, or experiences that had ever dared to obtrude a corner into her habit-smoothed existence.

She turned now complacently to view her work — and confronted a man: a disorderly looking man who had stumbled through the doorway, and who was gazing at her now with the eyes of a hunted animal at bay.

"For God's sake—don't give me away!" he begged. The next moment he had dashed by her and dropped out of sight behind the counter.

The woman caught her breath and rubbed her eyes dazedly. She was sure she was dreaming. There could not be a man, really, behind that counter—her counter!

Outside a swarm of men and boys headed by two policemen swept into the street and broke into irresolute little groups. Then one of the officers darkened her doorway.

"You didn't see a big, dark-haired chap, runnin', did ye?" he panted. "Bill thought he'd made fur this doorway. He might ha' slipped in when yer back was turned, ye know. If ye don't mind, we'll look." And he strode across the room, leaving his colleague to guard the door.

It was then that the extraordinary happened: Miss B. deliberately turned and walked behind her counter; and when she had taken up her position her skirts entirely screened the hiding man.

The building was a small one. It comprised

"FOR GOD'S SAKE—DON'T GIVE ME AWAY!"

the store, with a bedroom, bathroom, and living-room behind it, and a wide, unfinished room above where were a few surplus goods, trunks and boxes. A search in this limited area naturally could not be of long duration; and the officer was soon back in the store.

"You're off, Bill," he growled. "He ain't here. Thank ye, ma'am," he nodded toward the woman behind the counter. The next moment the door banged shut, and the gesticulating men and boys took themselves noisily out of sight.

In the store the woman backed hurriedly away from her position. All the bravery had fled from her manner. She stood white and trembling, waiting.

There was a moment's silence, then from the shadows peered a man's face.

"They gone?"

"Yes."

The man gazed at her curiously; then his eyes softened.

"See here, little woman, you sure was game," he murmured. "But — why did you do it?"

The woman shook her head.

"I — don't — know," she stammered.

"You don't know?"

Again she shook her head.

"Your eyes — they looked somehow like — Bobby's," she faltered.

The man smiled.

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to — Bobby," he said gravely.

"You see, there was a dog after him, just like those men were after you," explained the woman, hurriedly; "and he ran to me for protection just as you did. I kept him then almost a year."

"You kept him!"

"Yes. Then he died. He'd got to be a real big cat then, though."

"Oh-h!" murmured the man. "Oh-h!"

"And he was such a good cat! He always — sh-h — be careful!"

The warning was scarcely needed, for the man, too, had heard the step at the street door, and had drawn back hastily.

The customer was a woman. She said she wanted a spool of number sixty thread; but

she spent just one minute buying that — and ten minutes talking about the recent excitement. Not that she knew who the fugitive was, or what he had done. She knew merely that dozens of men and boys were scouring the neighborhood, and as yet they had not found him. She speculated vaguely as to where he might be, adding nonchalantly, as she turned to go:

"But then, I reckon he's left these 'ere parts long ago."

"You see," shivered Miss B., tremulously addressing the dark corner a moment later, "you'll really have to go — man!"

Two reproachful eyes looked out at her.

"But, my dear lady, I've just come."

"But they're looking for you — everywhere!"

"They are — like dogs, for my life." It was a trial shot, but it hit the mark. Miss B. winced visibly. "You see, if I could just camp here till dark," went on the man, softly, hurrying to follow up his advantage.

"Till dark — here! No, no!" shuddered the woman.

"Of course not, here, under the counter," agreed the man, crawling from his hiding-place and rising to his feet; "but in there — behind the store. Sure, little woman, you ain't goin' back on me — now!"

"But I must! You couldn't! You — *run!*" she broke off frenziedly, leaping to the door that led to the rear room and throwing it wide open. A moment later she stood shaking, alone, her back against the closed door. Then the street door opened and a woman entered.

"Why, land o' love, Miss B., don't jump so. It's only me," laughed the newcomer. "Did ye think it was the man they're chasin'? He's gone ages ago, I'll warrant ye. Say, I want some black elastic — the round kind. Got any?"

"Yes," said Miss B., faintly, as she forced her shaking limbs to carry her to the elastic-box behind the counter.

Trade was good at Hayden's Notion Store that morning. The rush of custom — and gossip — gave Miss B. no time, indeed, to attend to that fearsome secret behind her living-

room door until noon. Then she managed timidly to open the door and peer into the little room. At once she stepped inside and shut the door very quickly, her eyes wide with surprise and terror.

The man stood before the stove scrambling eggs. The table was neatly set for two, and the room smelt pleasantly of coffee and baked potatoes.

"Getting hungry?" smiled the man. "It's 'most ready. I thought you'd be comin' in about now. I could n't find any meat, but my scrambled eggs are great. You just wait and see!"

Miss B. moistened her dry lips and tried to speak, but no sound came.

"If you'll just sit down," suggested the man, cheerfully, motioning her toward the nearer chair.

The woman shook her head. This time she spoke, but her words were not at all what she had supposed they would be.

"It's broken — that chair."

"Not much it is!" laughed the man, whisking the chair bottom side up. "I mended

it — see? Now try it," he ordered a moment later. And to her dazed amazement Miss B. found herself obeying — it was a favorite chair, and she had long missed its use.

"I reckon we don't want — visitors," chuckled the man, then, crossing to the door and turning the key. "You see, you might not hear that 'ere bell on the store door."

"No, no, you must n't — I can't! You must go!" she protested incoherently.

"But — you would n't send me off — hungry!"

Weakly Miss B. fell back in the chair the man had mended, and gazed at the dinner the man had prepared. Then she sighed.

"No, I 'll not send you away — hungry," she murmured faintly.

"Thank you," said the man, and sat down.

The afternoon was but a repetition of the forenoon except that now Miss B. utterly refused to discuss the morning's excitement with one of the dawdling shoppers. At five o'clock she found an opportunity to open the living-room door and toss the evening paper, which had just come, on to the table. She had

not read the paper, but she had seen that there were huge black headlines. She could imagine what those headlines said.

At six o'clock Miss B., with a sigh of relief, closed and locked the store. It would be a simple matter now, she said to herself. In less than two hours it would be dark, and then her castle would be her own once more.

In the living-room only silence and exquisite order greeted her. Even the newspaper was gone, and the man was nowhere to be seen.

"Where are you?" called Miss B., sharply.

There was no answer.

With heightened color and compressed lips Miss B. crossed the floor to her bedroom door. If he had dared—

But he had not dared, apparently. The room was exactly as she had left it that morning. Miss B. turned then her steps toward the stairway that led to the unfinished storeroom above. At the top she paused, and peered into the shadowy room before her. On the floor lay the prostrate figure of a man. A loose board under her feet cracked sharply, and the

man sprang half upright. At the sheer terror that leaped to his eyes Miss B. shuddered and drew back.

"You needn't fear. It's only I," she faltered timidly—and she had meant to be so stern!

The man, too, shuddered.

"I must have dropped asleep—a minute," he muttered. "I thought—" He did not finish his sentence, and after a moment the woman spoke again, unsteadily.

"Come; you must have something to eat—before you go." And she led the way down the stairs.

It was Miss B. who prepared the meal this time. The man tried to help her, but his hands shook, and his feet stumbled as if his eyes could not see. Miss B. noticed then that his face had grown white and set. There was now no merry smile on his lips. At supper, too, he ate almost nothing. Miss B. thought she understood—it was those headlines. No man could have an appetite after being a two-inch headline in a horrid newspaper! And to her surprise she found herself urging him to

eat. She told him he needed it; that he did not know where he would get his next meal. He winced at this, and fell silent. But he did not eat.

At seven o'clock Miss B. lighted her lamp.

"It will be dark — quite dark soon," she said feverishly.

The man roused himself and rose to his feet.

"Miss — er, are you Miss Hayden?"

"Yes; Miss B. Hayden. Every one says 'Miss B.'"

"Well, I wonder, Miss B., if you know — what you 've done for me — to-day?" he asked in a low voice.

She stirred restlessly, and raised a protesting hand.

"And I wonder," he continued slowly, "if you 'd be willing — to do — more."

"No, no, I must n't! There 's nothing I could do," she cried excitedly, staring into his face.

He turned and walked the length of the room, dropping himself into a chair before he spoke.

"Somewhere, years ago," he began, "I

read a bit of history about some judges that had condemned a king to death. They had to hide to save their lives, and they came to New England. A minister took one and hid him in a secret room for twenty years. And no one knew that he was there. So you see — it can be — done."

The woman paled and started forward in her chair.

"You don't mean — you can't mean — " she stammered wildly, "that I — I — " She could not finish her sentence.

He made a gesture of dissent. The old whimsical smile came back to his face.

"Not for twenty years, of course; but, perhaps — for half of — twenty days," he murmured.

She sprang to her feet.

"No, no, never! It is impossible. I never heard of such a thing!"

"But I have just told you of one — for twenty years."

"But, I alone — a woman! Things like that don't happen, really, nowadays. They — could n't!"

"No, they could n't," echoed the man in a dull voice, with a sudden change of manner. "You are right. They — could n't." He rose from his chair and went over to the fireplace. He seemed suddenly bent and old. "Don't worry. It will soon be dark," he murmured with forced cheeriness. "And then — I 'll go."

Miss B. sat down impotently. Her whole face was drawn into anxious terrified lines.

"Was it the — paper?" she asked.

He turned sharply.

"Did you — read it?" he demanded.

"No; but I thought maybe those — headlines — " she stopped helplessly.

An odd relief showed in the man's eyes. With a nervous movement he thrust his hand into his hip pocket and crowded into smaller space the half-sheet of newspaper that was there.

"It was — the paper," he acknowledged. "They 're after me — and they 'll get me, of course."

Miss B. wet her lips.

"But what could I do?" she stammered.

For a moment he did not answer; then he spoke, his eyes carefully avoiding hers.

"If I could stay — up there" — he jerked his thumb toward the room above — "for a week, or maybe two, there'd be a chance then that I'd get away — without their — spottin' me."

In thinking it over after she had tremblingly gone to bed that night, Miss B. could not tell just how the man had carried the day. She knew only that he had carried it, and that he lay now in the room above on an old mattress that had been stored there. In her own room Miss B. had protected herself with lock and bolt, and with a huge trunk barricading the door. Even yet she could not realize it — this fearsome thing she had done. That she had, of her own free will, given a strange man secret shelter beneath her roof seemed incredible.

With the coming of the dawn began strange days for the mistress of Hayden's Notion Store. Miss B., accustomed half her life to solitary meals prepared by herself, found now a curious charm in those prepared by, and

shared with, an agreeable companion who plainly did his utmost to please. Her daily life, too, began to take to itself an unwonted interest, perhaps because of the excitement of listening every evening to thrilling tales of travel and adventure in a world that Miss B. scarcely knew existed. Even the little rooms themselves awoke to a change, for everywhere broken springs and unglued joints responded as if by magic to the touch of strength and skill; and in one corner a wonderful set of shelves (made from a packing-box) displayed to view the realization of one of Miss B.'s dearest longings.

So one by one the days passed. That she was doing wrong in harboring thus a fugitive from the law never occurred to Miss B. She was alone in the world, and as she looked at it, there was no one to whom she was answerable, even though she did choose in this way to help a fellow-being.

The man himself was deferential, anxious to serve, and always pleasant. He seemed never to forget the service being done him, though he seldom referred to the cause that

had called it forth. What he had done to occasion the search of the officers he did not tell, and Miss B. did not inquire. He did ask once for the newspaper, but only once, for Miss B. had nervously replied:

"I've stopped it. That first night it—it seemed to worry you; so I thought maybe 't would be better if you didn't see it for a while."

"You think if I don't know where *they* are, they won't know where I am, eh?" he had asked a little wearily.

He had told her that his name was "Jack"; and "Mr. Jack" she called him. It is doubtful, however, if she realized in the least how very large on her horizon this same Mr. Jack was looming.

In the store Miss B. had from that first day stopped all talk concerning the disquieting morning when her house was searched; and as no one but herself ever had any business in the rooms behind the store, her visitor's presence was easily kept a secret.

There came a day, however, when the unexpected happened: Miss B. was taken ill. A

hard cold, dosed faithfully all day, refused to yield to treatment, and by night had developed really alarming symptoms.

"You should have a doctor; you must have a doctor," asserted Mr. Jack.

"No, no," croaked Miss B., huskily. "As if we could have a doctor come here! Besides, there's no one to get him. *You* can't go for a doctor, and I haven't any telephone, you know."

Mr. Jack set his lips suddenly into a straight, hard line, whereat Miss B. hastened to add:

"I don't need one, anyway. I'll be better in the morning."

"You will, indeed — or there will be a doctor," retorted the man, savagely, as he bent himself to the task of preparing a flaxseed poultice for Miss B.'s throat and lungs.

Miss B. went to bed that night with neither bolt nor lock nor barricading trunk to guard her door. It was all her hot, shaking hands could do to prepare herself for the smooth sheets that felt so cool and restful to her aching limbs.

In the room above, Mr. Jack did not go to bed at all, but sat up all night with his door wide open so that he might hear if from below should come a feeble call. As the night advanced his face became more haggard, and his mouth more sternly set. Long before dawn he crept downstairs and carried back with him a pencil and some paper. After that he wrote busily by the light of his little oil lamp.

At six o'clock Mr. Jack went downstairs to get breakfast. After a time he tapped at Miss B.'s door. There was no answer.

"Miss B., how are you?"

Still no answer.

The man drew in his breath then and held it suspended while he softly turned the knob and pushed open the door.

"Miss B., I'll have to know if you're—sick," he stammered.

In the bed a wild-eyed, flushed-cheeked woman sat straight up, staring into his face.

"Go away," she whispered. "I don't know you!" Plainly Miss B. was ill.

With a dismayed exclamation the man

closed the door, and hurriedly effaced all evidences of his recent efforts toward breakfast-getting. Then, tucking into Miss B.'s work-basket the letter he had written during the night, he thrust his hat far down over his eyes, unlocked the back door, and watched his chance to slip out into the alley.

For some weeks Hayden's Notion Store remained closed to the public. In the rear rooms Miss B., with the anxious aid of the doctor, a nurse, and sundry kind-hearted neighbors, was making a brave fight for life. It was a long fight, and a hard one; but in the end Miss B. opened wide her eyes, alight with her long-lost reason.

She began to ask some questions immediately. There seemed to be something that she wanted to say — and yet she did not say it at once. At last the doctor heard this:

"Doctor, that man who ran away from the police — did he ever get caught?"

"Yes; but as it happened, the man he shot didn't die, after all, so it won't go hard —" The doctor stopped suddenly. Miss B. had fainted.

It was not until Miss B. had been up and dressed in her wrapper for three days that she found the closely written sheets of note-paper in her workbasket. Then with a little sobbing cry she settled herself to read them.

Dear Miss B. [Mr. Jack had written]:

It ain't daylight yet, but I'm going to write this now, as I'm afraid it will be too late to-morrow. I shall be gone then, for I'm sure I'll have to get a doctor to you somehow in the morning.

But first I want to tell you a little how I feel. I'm afraid I can't though. I don't know where to begin. Here I am sitting up here worse than helpless while downstairs the woman I love — there! I've said it. That was the part I didn't know how to get out, and here it's come the first thing. I reckon, anyhow, I hadn't ought to said it. I know you'll say so when you read the rest of this letter.

You sure have been game, little woman, and I haven't been worth it. Still — well, I *have* lived a rough life, but not a bad one — not a really bad one. I shall not forget these seven days, nor you neither, Miss B., and I want to explain right here about — what I did. I didn't know until the paper came that night that I'd really killed that man — though he deserved killing all right. He was Bud Durgin, the rascal that married my little sister May years ago, broke her heart, and then deserted

her. She 's dead now, and I had n't seen him for years till I met him by chance that morning. We quarreled, of course, and he said something about May — a black lie straight from the black heart of him — that made me crazy mad. We pulled our guns, both of us. His shot missed, but mine — did n't. He fell, and I ran, and found — you. Of course by the time you read this, I shall be caught, and it will be all up. But I wanted you to know.

I hope you 'll be better in the morning, but I 'm afraid you won't. And if you ain't I shall hide this somewhere, and go out and telephone for a doctor. Anyhow, I 've made up my mind I shall have to tell you all this pretty soon, no matter what comes, for I 'm ashamed to impose on you any longer, or to play the sneak. I 'm going to speak up. If things had been different — if my hands were n't stained so you 'd shudder to touch them, I 'd made you love me sometime. I sure would.

And now let me say that I 'm glad — glad to do this thing for you. Don't fret about me when you find out how — I was caught. Just remember I was glad to do it. Somehow, it seems to square things — for me. And now, just this once, as long as it is the last time, I reckon you 'll forgive me if I sign myself,

Yours with a heart just breaking with love and sorrowfulness,

JACK

Miss B. sat very still. Her eyes were wet,

and her whole face was a rosy flush. Once more she read the letter through; then with a wondrous light in her eyes she rose unsteadily and crossed the room to her desk.

Long minutes later, when her halting little note was finished, she paused with her pen suspended.

"I'll have to ask the doctor his name, and —and where he is," she murmured, tremulously. "One could n't very well address a — a love letter just to 'Mr. Jack.'"

Loosed

TWO days before the wedding of Elizabeth Winston and Elmer Craddock, Miss Winston's father met the prospective bridegroom in the Park.

Both were on horseback, and each reined in as he saw the other.

"Ah, good-morning, my boy," cried Winston, turning about. "I've been wanting a few words with you for some time; and at the house — well, the fuss and feathers there just now are not conducive to that sort of thing; eh?"

A tender light flamed into the younger man's eyes.

"They are not," he agreed, with a smile. "But — they'll soon be over, sir."

The other did not reply. His eyes were studying the young man's face. At last he drew a deep breath and placed a heavy hand on the broad, square-cut shoulder near him.

"Egad, Craddock, I'm sure I can trust her to you — my Betty!"

"I hope so, sir," Craddock said simply.

"She's so affectionate — Betty is," Winston resumed. "So tender, so delicate, so — well, perhaps she's a little spoiled. She — she's always had her own way," he added, with an apologetic little laugh.

"And it shall be my pleasure still to give it to her," declared the lover fervently.

The older man smiled.

. . . . . .

In November, Mr. and Mrs. Craddock opened their modest little establishment on West Eighty-second Street and began life in earnest.

"And to think you've got to leave me and go to that tiresome old office!" demurred Elizabeth the first morning, her hands upraised to her husband's shoulders.

"Sure, dear; but I'm a responsible citizen now," laughed Craddock. "I'm no longer a floating atom; I'm a family man with duties to myself and the commonwealth!" he finished with mock impressiveness.

"You'll be lonesome!"

"Of course."

"You'll just long to see me!"

"Indeed I shall."

"Maybe—maybe I'll come down!"

Craddock laughed, kissed her tenderly, and ran down the steps for his car. He had forgotten all about the matter when, three hours later, she hurried into his office, flushed, trembling, and angry-eyed, followed by an expostulating office boy.

"This silly boy did not wish to let me in," began Elizabeth, "—*me*. Wanted to know my name and my business."

"Yes, but he—he was only obeying orders, you see, dear. He—"

"Orders!—not to let me in!"

"No, dear, no," he said softly. "You don't understand. It's orders for anyone—everyone; I should be tormented to death if—"

"But didn't you tell him I was coming?"

"Why, no, I—didn't."

"You forgot?"

"Well—perhaps I did."

"Oh, shame!" laughed Mrs. Craddock,

shaking a playfully admonitory finger. At this moment the boy entered and handed Craddock a card. The man made an impatient gesture and threw a helpless glance at his wife.

"It's Henderson. I had an appointment. Er—I'm sorry, but—I must see him."

"Dear me, how tiresome! Well, never mind; I'll wait."

"Yes, but you—he—I—come in here, then," said Craddock hurriedly, opening the door to an inner room.

Twice during the next fifteen nervous minutes Craddock heard the door behind him pushed on its hinges. Henderson, who had expected to exert the utmost of his tact and persuasiveness for at least a good half-hour, found himself at the end of these fifteen minutes ready to depart with papers which represented a deal so advantageous to himself that he hardly believed it real.

"There, I thought he would never go!" cried Mrs. Craddock almost before the door had clicked behind the visitor. "Elmer, when do you go to luncheon? I'm so hungry!"

"Er — now," returned her husband, with manifest alacrity, as he reached for his hat.

An hour and a half later he was bidding good-bye to his wife before the door of an uptown hotel, where they had lunched with long waits — and a yet longer bill.

That was but the first of many visits. Elizabeth insisted that her husband must be lonely; that it was her duty to look after him, to see that his luncheon was suitable, and partaken of with sufficient moderation.

Craddock's business, also, was taken into her tender care, and grave questions were asked as to his income, his expenses, and his methods of dealing with his employees. A wife ought to know, she said. Incidentally, she was able to make many suggestions in the way of improvements.

It was after some six months of married bliss that Craddock came home one night with thoughtful eyes and a preoccupied air. After dinner he said:

"I'm sorry, dear, but I must go out tonight."

"Out? Why, Elmer!"

"It's business, dear — Henderson; I'm to meet him at the club."

"Oh, is *that* it?" laughed Elizabeth. "I was afraid you really were obliged to go. Just telephone him you can't come, of course. As if I were going to give up my evening for any man that ever breathed."

Her husband's jaw fell.

"But, dearest, I've got to go; don't you see? I said I would."

"You *said* you would, when you knew we always spent our evenings together? Why, Elmer!"

"I know, but —"

"Oh, very well, if you prefer it. Never mind. I have a headache; I'll go at once to my room." And she swept through the hall door.

"Well, by George!" muttered Craddock under his breath. He hesitated, twice crossed the length of the room, then hurried to the telephone, there to notify Henderson that, owing to Mrs. Craddock's illness, his engagement could not be kept.

It was a very happy, loving Elizabeth that

exerted every power to please during the next two hours, and so successful was she that Craddock vowed that he was a brute to think of leaving her; thereafter, business would be attended to during business hours, or not at all!

Time passed, and Craddock grew strangely restless. He ran across an advertisement one day, the picture of a man bound by slender threads whose number made their strength. It came to him, then, that he was that man.

It seemed to him, sometimes, that there was not an hour of his time nor an act of his daily life that did not strain against those cords.

There was his food; he ate, now, not the pies and hot breads which he craved, but the cereals and dry toast of his wife's ordering, and he drank a grain coffee — a thing he abhorred. Again, his clothes; the cut of his coat and the color of his tie were now according to Elizabeth's fancy.

In April Mrs. Craddock was suddenly called to the bedside of her grandmother. Craddock was actually shocked at himself as he realized

that during the first week of her absence he had spent six evenings at the club and reveled in pie every day.

It was while Elizabeth was away that she chanced to meet her childhood's friend, Timothy, the old gardener.

"Well, well, Timothy," she exclaimed, "I 'm glad to see you! And how does the world use you, these days? — and how 's Mary?"

A queer look came over the man's face.

"Mary? Why, Miss 'Liz'beth, did n't yer know? We 're parted — Mary an' I be."

"Parted! Why, Timothy, I 'm ashamed of you — and Mary was such a good woman!"

"That 's jest it, ma'am; she was too good — she was."

"Oh, Timothy!"

"Well, she was," reiterated the man. "She was that good she jest thought there wan't anyone else in the world that knew nothin'. She made me hoe my pertaters jest so, an' she always bossed my eatin' an' drinkin', an' she would n't let me work bareheaded."

Mrs. Craddock laughed.

"Oh, fie! Timothy, that was only her care

of you. Mary used to think a lot of you—I know!—I remember! You should have been pleased that she loved you so well."

"That wan't it, ma'am, that wan't it," demurred Timothy, with a shake of his head. "I could 'a' stood lovin'—lots of it; but she tied me all up with them notions of hern. I couldn't do nothin' ma'am, nothin' as I wanted to. I tell yer, ma'am, I 'll never furgit that first week after she went; I did ev'rythin'—ev'rythin' she hadn't let me do fur so long!"

Four days later Elizabeth returned home. It was earlier in the week than she had written she would come, and she decided to surprise her husband by an unexpected appearance.

An hour after her arrival she called Katie to consult with her about the dinner.

"Mr. Craddock has ordered it, ma'am," said the girl; "but maybe you'll be after making some changes. He—he ordered pie and hot rolls, for two things."

"Oh," said Mrs. Craddock, flushing. She bit her lip, then smiled sweetly. "I think perhaps I will change that, Katie; those things

are not good for Mr. Craddock. We 'll have the meat and vegetables as you 've planned, but for dessert, rice-pudding, perhaps, and — coffee, as usual."

"Yes, ma'am — er — you mean cereal coffee, as we used to have?"

"'Used to have'?"

"Yes, ma'am, Mr. Craddock has — has had real coffee, you see, lately."

"Oh, I understand; well, the cereal will be better for night, I think," returned Mrs. Craddock hastily.

"Yes, ma'am." Katie hesitated, then she said timidly: "Mr. Craddock ordered dinner to be prompt, ma'am, as he was going out."

"G-going out?"

"Yes, ma'am; he most generally goes out now — you bein' gone, so."

"Very well, Katie, that will do," returned Mrs. Craddock faintly, turning away.

Then before her eyes rose a hateful vision. It was Timothy, as he said: "I tell yer, ma'am, I 'll never furgit that first week after she went; I did ev'rythin' — ev'rythin' she had n't let me do fur so long!"

Two minutes later, flushed and trembling, Mrs. Craddock faced Katie in the kitchen.

"I've changed my mind, Katie," she said. "We'll have hot rolls, pie, and coffee, just as Mr. Craddock ordered."

THE END

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